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ABSTRACT

This PLACE Sourcebook on the World of Work provides clients in employment counseling with information about occupations, the norms of the labor market, and sources that clients can consult to find additional information on the part of PLACE related to doing well on the job. For each employment-related topic in the corresponding Workbook (CE 031 887) there is a section in the Sourcebook that clients can read to analyze the nature of employment requirements for that topic. The Sourcebook can also be used by clients to find out what is meant by questions in the workbook to determine how they should be answered. It sets forth those skills or resources that must be obtained to overcome each employment problem. Topics covered include looking and acting the part (appearance, timekeeping, and following company policies), meeting work standards (work methods and care of equipment and materials), working with people (communications skills and human relations skills), and showing initiative. (YLB)

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PLACE

Guided steps to employment readiness

Sourcebook on the World of Work
Part D
Doing Well on the Job

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Keira Hawkins worked with the developer in writing this component of PLACE.

NOTE:

This is one in a series of PLACE publications. The full series includes:

PLACE Workbook, Parts A/B, Identifying Your Occupation/Fitting the Requirements
PLACE Sourcebook, Parts A/B, Identifying Your Occupation/Fitting the Requirements

PLACE Workbook, Part C, Getting the Job
PLACE Sourcebook, Part C, Getting the Job

PLACE Workbook, Part D, Doing Well on the Job
PLACE Sourcebook, Part D, Doing Well on the Job

PLACE Workbook, Part E, Personal Needs
PLACE Sourcebook, Part E, Personal Needs

PLACE Directory to Employment-Related Programs and Services

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Introduction

The purpose of this Sourcebook is to tell you generally what the unwritten rules of work are and why they exist. The guidelines provided here should help anyone who is unsure of how to behave on the job.

The important word here is "guidelines." No one can tell you exactly what you should do in each and every situation you encounter. Your actions will necessarily be based on the kind of situation you find yourself in and your relationships with the people at work. You will always have to make your own decisions and there are no simple or right answers. However, to make good decisions you must understand the general rules of working behavior and that is what this book describes.

This Sourcebook is designed to accompany Part D of the PLACE Workbook. Your first step is to answer the questions in the Workbook. If your answers suggest that you have problems with particular types of working behaviors, you will be referred to the pages in this Sourcebook that deal with those issues.

Each of the four chapters in this book starts with an introduction to the subject and a story that outlines the questions to be dealt with in the chapter. For example, the first chapter includes a story that illustrates the problems you could have with your appearance, timekeeping and with following company policies. After each story, there are questions to help you analyze your situation. After each set of questions, you will be referred to the page in the Sourcebook that deals with the issue of particular concern to you. So, for example, if your problem is appearance you will be told to go to page 11; if it is timekeeping you will be sent to page 16; and if it is following company policies, you will be referred to page 21. You should

always read the introductory pages of the chapter the Workbook has suggested. Then, you need only read the pages that deal with your problem area. The rest you can skip. Of course, you can read the entire book if you find it helpful. It may remind you of things that you had forgotten.

After you have read the Sourcebook, you may still feel that you need further help to improve your working behavior. If so, turn to the "Solutions Planning Chart" (page 20 of the Workbook). You can use it with the PLACE Directory to Employment- Related Programs and Services, which will help you find appropriate solutions. As well, you should ask your counsellor to refer you to programs that deal with your personal problem areas.

Chapter 1 / Looking and Acting the Part

INTRODUCTION

At work, both employers and other workers judge you first by whether you fit their image of a responsible worker. They form their early opinions based on very obvious facts--whether your clothes and grooming make you look like one of the gang, whether you arrive at work on time and whether you follow rules like wearing safety equipment when it is required. You may feel that these things are very superficial--that they don't show your ability to do the work. Of course, you are right. But first impressions are very important. You may never get the chance to prove that you are a good worker if you get off on the wrong foot by failing to look and act the part.

People first notice your appearance. Without being consciously aware of what they are doing, they base their views about you on your clothing and grooming. Over the next few days or weeks, they notice small things about the way you follow rules, like whether you always leave a little early or stretch your coffee breaks by an extra minute or two. And they notice whether you follow other company rules like security regulations or health rules.

The following story illustrates the problems one woman ran into when she returned to work. After the story there are some questions that should help you understand what she was doing wrong and how she could go about improving her behavior.

* * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * *

"WHERE DID I GO WRONG?..."

Mary was feeling very nervous. This morning she was starting a new job. She hadn't worked for about ten years because she had been at home bringing up the kids. Now they were all in school and she had finally decided to go back to work. It was a big step, and she kept having nightmares that she wouldn't be able to cope.

"Today, of all days, why does everything have to go wrong?" she wailed to herself as she rushed around trying to do everything at once. Making beds, doing dishes, getting lunches, making breakfast, getting the kids ready --there was so much to do! The kids had dragged their feet and it had taken twice as long as usual to get them out of the house.

Rushing upstairs to get herself dressed, she felt tense and edgy. And now she realized, with a sinking feeling, that the dress she'd been planning to wear had a stain right down the front. She hesitated, close to tears, then grabbed for her black silk party dress. "It's a bit fancy but it will have to do. Besides, I LIKE to wear it," she thought defiantly to herself. Now it was time to put on her make-up and perfume. Nervously, she applied more than usual, thinking vaguely to herself that it would make her look more "with it"--more like the other people she expected to meet at the bank.

Throwing on her coat, she looked at her watch and panicked. "I'll have to run all the way to the bus stop," she groaned. As she turned the corner, Mary saw the bus pulling away. She was just too late. So she paced back and forth at the bus stop for what seemed like forever. Finally, 20 minutes later, the next bus appeared. The ride downtown was agony. The traffic was heavy--an accident had slowed everything down. When Mary finally arrived at the bank's front door she was 25 minutes late.

"I'm so sorry, I don't know why, but everything went wrong, the kids were so slow and the bus was late and I hope I haven't caused you trouble," Mary explained breathlessly when she was introduced to her supervisor. From the way Mrs. Boyd, her supervisor, rushed her to a chair, gave her some manuals with a vague instruction to read them carefully, and hurried off, Mary got the clear impression that her boss was annoyed. "Well, it's not my fault everything went against me," she thought defensively as she glanced through the booklets she had been given.

The manuals seemed to be filled with rules and procedures. After reading one or two sections, Mary decided that she couldn't make any sense of

the material. However, she had worked in a bank before she was married, and she decided that it would all come back to her if she just watched what the others were doing. So she closed up the books and looked around.

Finally, Mrs. Boyd came back. "Well, Mary, do you have any questions about the procedures here?" she asked, with a friendly smile.

Hiding her doubts, Mary answered brightly, "Oh no, I worked in a bank before and it's just like I remembered."

"Well, it's good to get an experienced worker," replied Mrs. Boyd. "Now, if you could just describe our morning security procedures, I'll take you over to Jo, who will be training you."

Mary felt her stomach sink. What security procedures? She didn't remember seeing anything about that! She shook her head slowly, saying, "I...I guess I...didn't...uh...see...that page..."

Mary could tell that her supervisor was irritated. "In a bank, Mary, it is very important that everyone know and follow security procedures," Mrs. Boyd said sharply. "They are there to protect your personal safety and they must be obeyed. I think you had better read those books again a little more carefully. And if you have any questions, please come and ask me."

At the end of the day, after the other tellers had left, Mary stood alone in the washroom and cried. The other women hadn't been very friendly. She had even overheard one of them making fun of her appearance. And Mrs. Boyd seemed very cold and cross. "Maybe I should quit," she thought sadly to herself. "I just don't seem to fit in."

Suddenly, she sensed that she wasn't alone. Turning on her heel, she saw Mrs. Boyd and froze. Magically, her supervisor smiled sympathetically and spoke. "It's hard starting back to work, isn't it? There is so much to relearn. Choosing the right sort of clothes, rearranging your schedule so you can get to work on time, and learning new rules and procedures. You've had a rough day, but I think you have learned some things. Try to get yourself organized tonight and tomorrow we'll make a fresh start."

* * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * *

THE NEXT STEPS

Below are some questions to help you figure out where Mary went wrong and what she could have done instead. You could either ask a friend to read the

story and discuss your answers together or you could make short notes of your answers on a separate sheet of paper. PLEASE DO NOT WRITE IN THIS BOOK.

(a) APPEARANCE

-- Mary felt hurt when she overheard someone making fun of her appearance. Do you think it matters what you look like at work? Why or why not?

-- What could Mary have done to avoid looking out of place?

IF YOU WANT TO LEARN MORE ABOUT APPEARANCE, TURN NOW TO PAGE 11.

(b) TIMEKEEPING

-- When Mary arrived late for work she realized that her supervisor was annoyed. If you were the boss, how would you deal with workers who were often late or absent? Why?

-- Do you think it's Mary's responsibility to get to work on time? Why or why not?

-- What would you advise Mary to do to make sure she arrived at work on time every day?

IF YOU WANT TO LEARN MORE ABOUT TIMEKEEPING, TURN NOW TO PAGE 16.

(c) FOLLOWING COMPANY POLICIES

-- Mary very quickly got into trouble because she failed to learn company policies and procedures. Do you think it is important to learn about the policies of the organization you work for? Why or why not?

-- When Mary had trouble understanding the employee manuals she had been given, what should she have done?

IF YOU WANT TO LEARN MORE ABOUT FOLLOWING COMPANY POLICIES, TURN NOW TO PAGE 21.

(a) A P P E A R A N C E

People will first judge you by how you look. This may not seem fair--after all, appearance is only skin deep, clothes don't make the man, and you are willing to prove that you are a good worker. Fair or not, however, the fact is that you will be evaluated on your appearance. Besides, you know, yourself, that you form opinions about the people you meet based solely on what they look like. So it is only reasonable to expect that they are doing the same thing. As well, employers have learned that in many cases the appearance of an individual reflects his/her attitudes. Lack of concern about your appearance may reflect either a careless attitude about doing a good job or a kind of immaturity.

The type of clothing and grooming that is suitable at work varies among occupations. For example, a mechanic would look and be out of place crawling under cars in a three-piece suit; a dentist with dirty finger nails would be a health hazard; and a judge presiding over a court room in blue jeans would indicate a lack of respect for the law. At home you have a perfect right to dress to please yourself; at work you have a responsibility to suit your appearance to your work environment.

It is important that your clothing not interfere with your ability to do the work. For example, if you have to do a lot of walking on the job, your shoes should be sturdy enough that you won't harm your feet or cause yourself pain. You also shouldn't have to worry about ruining your clothes or getting them dirty. If you have to think about what you are wearing when you are doing your job, you won't be able to give your full attention to your duties.

The best way to find out about the clothing and grooming requirements in your occupation is to observe the appearance of people at work or to ask someone who is working in the occupation for advice. However, the following guidelines may give you a general idea of what is expected.

LOOKING AND ACTING THE PART

1. Managerial and Professional Occupations

In managerial occupations, or in professional occupations such as natural sciences, social sciences, religion, teaching, etc., you would normally wear fairly conservative, formal business clothing such as suits of subdued colour, material and design. Because in most of these jobs you will be dealing regularly with others, your personal grooming and hygiene should be correct--clean, neatly-styled hair; clean hands, nails, face and teeth; and a generally healthy businesslike look.

2. Public Contact Occupations

In most sales, service or entertainment occupations, you would be expected to wear casual office-type clothes. Some sales and service establishments (stores, restaurants) require their staff to wear uniforms; if not, jackets or sweaters, matching slacks or skirts, and simple shirts or blouses, would almost always be suitable. Once again, because you are coming into close contact with others during the day, your personal grooming is important. A clean, fresh scent, neat hair, spotless hands, and fresh breath and teeth are necessary.

3. Occupations in Medicine and Health

In most of these occupations you would be expected to wear a spotless, neatly pressed, (usually) white uniform and shoes of a conservative style and made of sturdy material. Your personal hygiene must be perfect in order to reduce the risk of spreading disease or infection.

4. Indoor Manual Occupations

Because the work requires a good deal of physical activity and may be dusty or dirty, people in these occupations usually wear sturdy, comfortable clothing such as blue jeans, overalls, and workboots. Personal hygiene is important so as not to offend the people around you, but it is expected that hair, hands, etc. will not look immaculate all the time.

5. Outdoor Manual Occupations

In addition to the clothing and grooming requirements of workers in indoor manual occupations, people who work outdoors will need warm, sturdy, outer wear. It is impossible to do a good job if you are too hot or cold, so it is important that work clothes such as hats, gloves, boots and coats be designed more for comfort than beauty.

In order to help you improve your appearance, the following two sections will give you an outline of ways to deal with the question.

CLOTHING - IF YOU WANT TO LEARN MORE ABOUT CLOTHING, TURN NOW TO PAGE 14.

GROOMING - IF YOU WANT TO LEARN MORE ABOUT GROOMING, TURN NOW TO PAGE 15.

i. Guidelines for Clothing

1. Find out what type of clothing is suitable. Before you start your job, you should figure out what types of clothes to wear. If you know people who work in the occupation, you might ask them for advice. Better still, you might make a trip to your employer's office or worksite to see for yourself how people dress. By going to the cafeteria, or by watching people entering or leaving the building, you can find out what is normal. Mary, in our story, could have gone down to the bank the week before she started work and spent some time looking at the other tellers, for example. It is a good idea to make a list for yourself when observing people. Note what type of clothing they are wearing--suit, dress or slacks, uniform, etc. As well, note the kinds of colours they are wearing, the material the clothes are made from and the style of the clothes. Also observe their shoes, jewellery and other accessories.

2. Examine your own wardrobe. When you get home, take out all the clothes that you feel would be suitable based on your observations. Make sure everything is in good condition by making the necessary repairs and by cleaning and pressing your clothing. After each wearing, you should repair or clean your clothes if necessary, and hang them up ready for the next wearing.

3. Make a list of the clothing you need to purchase. Start with the things you need most and list them in the order that you plan to purchase them. You will probably not be able to afford to get everything at once, so it is important to start with the most necessary items. Remember, you do not need a lot of clothes--it is better to start with a few things that will last. You are not going to a fashion show; it is perfectly acceptable to wear the same one or two outfits all the time.

4. Set aside some time each week to clean and repair your clothes. They will last longer and look better if you give them regular care. It is important to develop a regular routine so that you don't slip back into poor habits.

ii. Guidelines for Grooming

1. Find out what type of grooming is suitable. Before you start a new job, you should find out how people are groomed by observing them at work. Take a trip down to your employer's place of business and observe how people are groomed--how they wear their hair, what their hands and nails look like, and their general overall appearance. For example, if everyone looks as if they recently came from a hairdresser or barber-shop, and your locks are left just as nature made them, you might consider getting your hair styled.

2. Develop a regular grooming routine. Set aside some time every day for regular grooming such as bathing, cleaning your nails and teeth, applying makeup etc. As well, set aside some time each week for more time-consuming tasks such as washing and styling your hair, manicuring your nails, etc. In short, make a regular routine for yourself, so that good hygiene and grooming become a routine part of your lifestyle.

(b) T I M E K E E P I N G

Employers often complain that new or inexperienced workers are poor timekeepers. They are often late or absent, and may even fail to let the employer know that they aren't going to show up at work. During the day they may waste time talking too much with other employees about personal matters, taking extra long coffee or lunch breaks, making several visits to the washroom, or even leaving a few minutes early.

Employers aren't just being mean when they discipline or fire workers who waste time. Often the wasted time costs the employer money in decreased production. It often interferes with the work of other employees. For example, Mary's lateness annoyed Mrs. Boyd because it interfered with the daily routine. Lateness or absence may cause service to the public to be disrupted. As well, other employees may become resentful and start to practise the same kind of behavior themselves. Think about how you would feel if you were a customer at Mary's bank and you were never sure that the bank would be open on time because all the employees were late regularly.

Timekeeping requirements vary depending both on the type of occupation and the attitude of the employer. If other people depend on your work, you will have to be very punctual. If, for example, you work on a production line, your lack of punctuality may slow down everyone's work or another employee may have to work overtime to make up for your absence. If you work in a store or other type of service occupation, both employers and clients depend on your being there when you said you would be.

In other jobs, for example many managerial and professional occupations, your arriving a few minutes late is not likely to interfere with the work of others. However, if you make a regular practice of such behavior, other workers are likely to become annoyed and resentful. If it bothers them enough, they can make your work hours unpleasant by being unfriendly or by making it more difficult for you to do your job.

Punctuality and attendance problems are often related to other issues. Mary, for example, ran into trouble because she had so many things to do for her family in the morning that she ran out of time to do things for herself. If you believe that your timekeeping problems are related to such things as care of dependents, transportation difficulties, or health problems, you should turn to Part E of the PLACE program, which is called "Personal Needs." There you will be helped to analyze your problem and to develop strategies to overcome it.

The two most common reasons for poor timekeeping behavior are: poor organization of time or a devil-may-care attitude. Mary's problem was poor time management. Rather than trying to do everything in the morning, for example, she might prepare her family's lunches the night before. She might also leave housekeeping chores such as washing the breakfast dishes or making the beds until the evening. Or she could make everyone get up earlier and get them to make their own beds.

For some people, timekeeping problems are the result of a failure to understand why they have to get to work on time. As has been mentioned, there are good reasons for punctuality, such as the fact that other people are depending on you. In addition, even if you don't care that other people may suffer, you might keep in mind that you can and will be fired for failure to abide by company timekeeping policies.

On the following pages you will be given guidelines for attendance, punctuality and informing others of your absence or lateness.

ATTENDANCE - IF YOU WANT TO LEARN MORE ABOUT ATTENDANCE, TURN NOW TO PAGE 18.

PUNCTUALITY - IF YOU WANT TO LEARN MORE ABOUT PUNCTUALITY, TURN NOW TO PAGE 19.

INFORMING OTHERS OF ABSENCE OR LATENESS - TURN TO PAGE 20 IF YOU WANT TO LEARN MORE ABOUT THIS.

1. Guidelines for Attendance

When you took your job, you made a contract with your employer that you would attend regularly. The only good reasons for failure to attend are personal illness or injury or important responsibilities towards your family or, sometimes, friends. The fact that the organization you work for permits one paid sick day per month or whatever, does not mean that you have the right to take off one day a month.

In addition to the fact that your employer may discipline you if it becomes obvious that you are misusing the sick leave policy, you may also run yourself into trouble when you do become really ill. If you have used all your paid sick leave when you weren't really sick, you may find yourself both unable to work and without any financial resources.

If your attendance problems are due to such things as care of dependents, personal poor health, legal problems, alcohol or drug use problems, you will have to deal with these problems in order to solve your attendance problem. Part E of the PLACE program is designed to help you find solutions to these issues.

If you often fail to attend because you hate your job, you might be wise to consider changing jobs or finding an occupation that suits you better. Ask your counsellor to show you how to use the Index to Canadian Occupations. It will help you search for occupations on the basis of your interests, abilities etc.

ii. Guidelines for Punctuality

Many people have trouble meeting the punctuality requirements for their job. The most common problem is an inability to arrive at work either at or slightly before the time set by their employer.

Many punctuality problems are caused by poor time management in the morning. If you are consistently late, you would be well-advised to make a list of all the things you have to do in the morning and make a note of how long it takes to do them. You should then plan to get up early enough in the morning to get everything done. As well, you might try to rearrange your activities so that some could be done the night before. Also, it is useful to get agreement from the other people you live with about an equitable sharing of housekeeping and child care tasks. Your goal should be to arrange a routine that permits you to arrive at work on time every day.

If your punctuality problems are caused by such things as care of dependents, transportation difficulties, poor health, or alcohol or drug misuse, you should turn to Part E of the PLACE program for strategies to overcome your roadblocks.

A number of people have timekeeping problems during working hours. They often take extra-long coffee or lunch breaks, spend an excessive amount of time in personal conversations with other workers or on the telephone, or slip out of the office a few minutes early on a regular basis. All these behaviors show poor work habits or an immature attitude to work. Ask yourself whether it is worth risking your job for the few extra minutes you gain for yourself each day. If the answer is yes, it would appear that you aren't very satisfied with your job. In that case you might consider examining your reasons for working and perhaps try to find another job that suits your needs better. Your counsellor can tell you about occupational exploration programs such as the Index to Canadian Occupations.

iii. Guidelines for Informing Others of Absence or Lateness

If you are going to be unavoidably absent from work or late for a work appointment or meeting, you should let your supervisor know as soon as you know yourself. Otherwise you may seriously disrupt the work of others. Your unexpected failure to turn up may throw an extra burden on everyone you work with by forcing them to do your work as well as their own. If you had warned of your lateness or absence, arrangements might have been made to get someone to fill in for you. At meetings, everyone may wait for you to appear; when you don't, the other people will feel very irritated by your lack of courtesy.

If you can predict your absence--for example, if you plan to move, go to a wedding or enter hospital for a scheduled operation--you should let your employer know well in advance that you plan to be absent at a particular time. This gives him/her the opportunity to find someone to cover for you.

If a sudden emergency or illness prevents you from going to work on a specific day, you should telephone your employer within the first fifteen minutes of your regular work day to explain your problem. It is best to make the call yourself rather than to get your spouse, parents or friends to call for you. If you absolutely cannot make the call yourself (if you wake up in the hospital with a broken leg, for example), it is acceptable to get someone to call for you. But as soon as you are able, you should phone personally to let your employer know what your problem is and when you expect to be able to return to work. If you have a good reason for your absence, there is no reason to be afraid to make the call yourself. Sometimes, missing work is unavoidable; that is what sick leave is for.

In order to be prepared for an unexpected absence, you should, during your first few days on a new job, discuss with your supervisor the procedure s/he wants you to follow. As well, make sure to make a note of the telephone number at work. Write it on a slip of paper and put it in your wallet so that you will have it when you need it. By planning ahead in this way, you will save yourself worry when the situation actually arises.

(c) FOLLOWING COMPANY POLICIES

Every organization has rules that workers are expected to follow. Their purpose is to define the employees' obligations to the employer and the organization's obligations to its workers. There are policies governing such things as working hours--starting time, number of working hours per day, leaving time, overtime requirements and breaks. There are also policies governing holidays, vacations, accidents, and sick or compassionate leave. There may be health and hygiene policies, especially if workers deal with food. There may be safety regulations if the work involves risk of accident or injury. And, in many jobs, there are rules about maintaining the privacy and confidentiality of information you learn at work. The purpose of most of these requirements is twofold--to protect the worker and to protect the employer. For example, health and safety regulations that govern the way you wear your hair or that require you to wear protective clothing or safety equipment are as much for your benefit as for the benefit of your employer.

Many organizations have formal procedures or guidelines for dealing with employee complaints. If you are unhappy with a policy or you feel that it is being enforced unfairly, you can seek to improve the situation by following the formal channels. Usually, this will mean bringing your problem to the attention of your supervisor, or to the union steward if you are in a unionized organization.

Many workers are not aware of the rules and procedures of the company they work for. Sometimes, the employer is at fault for not giving the information to new workers. Most often, however, especially in large organizations, the problem is due to the employee's failure to read the employee manuals that were provided. For example, Mary, the bank teller in the story, didn't bother to read the manuals she had been given because they looked too complicated. As a result, she failed to see important information about the bank's security procedures. There is a lesson to be learned from Mary's experience. Read the material you are given when you start a job. If you don't understand the manuals, ask your supervisor to explain them.

Guidelines for Following Company Policies

1. When you start a job, make a point of finding out the rules. Usually, your supervisor will tell you the rules during your first day. As well, you will also probably be given employee manuals that describe the work procedures, company policies and benefits. Make a point of reading them carefully before filing them in a handy location. Do not throw them out or ignore them.

   It is a good idea to make notes for yourself about the information your supervisor has given you. The list below indicates the areas you should find out about.

   1. Working Hours
      - Starting and leaving time
      - Number of hours per day
      - Overtime policies
      - Breaks
   2. Leave Policies
      - Holiday leave
      - Sick leave
      - Accident leave
      - Compassionate leave
   3. Health and Safety Regulations
   4. Privacy and Confidentiality Rules
   5. Grievance (Complaint) Procedures

   If your supervisor does not cover all these points, you should politely raise them yourself. By finding out about the rules early, you will save yourself problems later.

2. Find out the informal rules of the organization by watching other workers. In any organization, there are some unwritten rules or accepted ways of behaving. For example, the workers in one unit may have an informal system for sharing the work or there may be an informal rotation of lunch hours to make sure that telephone answering duties are shared equally. The only way to learn these rules is to keep your eyes open.

3. If you don't understand a rule or feel that it is being enforced unfairly, ask your supervisor or other workers for an explanation informally before grumbling or starting a formal complaint. Often, an informal chat can resolve the situation.

4. Even when you disagree with a rule or policy, it is your obligation to follow it until it has been changed. You can and should make your complaint known, but if you just ignore the rules, you can be fired.

Chapter 2 / Meeting Work Standards

INTRODUCTION

When you are hired to do a job, your employer expects that the work you produce will meet acceptable standards. Both the quality and the quantity of your work will be judged. If your work is full of errors or looks sloppy, you will be criticized for producing a poor quality. On the other hand, even if your work is perfect, if it takes you three times as long as anyone else to get it done, you will be criticized for working too slowly. Your aim is to do your work both correctly and quickly.

Your work methods (that is, the way you work) affect your productivity. If your workspace and work materials are neat and orderly, it is easier to make sure that your work will meet quality requirements. And if you plan and follow a regular routine, it becomes much easier to produce the necessary quantity of work.

Another aspect of meeting work standards is using your employer's equipment and materials with care. You are expected to treat them as carefully as you would your own possessions. If you break or damage equipment, or if you waste production materials, you increase the employer's costs. In other words, your poor work habits cost your employer money.

Many people have problems meeting work standards mainly because they aren't sure what is expected of them. Basically, once you have been taught your duties, you are expected to do them without constant supervision. You should learn to solve routine problems yourself and to report major problems or changes in your work routine to your supervisor. You will be expected to

take responsibility for the quality and quantity of your work. The information on the following pages is aimed at helping you to understand what the normal work requirements are and how to go about meeting them.

IF YOU WANT TO LEARN MORE ABOUT WORK METHODS, GO TO PAGE 27.

IF YOU WANT TO LEARN MORE ABOUT CARE OF EQUIPMENT AND MATERIALS, GO TO PAGE 43.

(a) WORK METHODS

"THERE MUST BE A BETTER WAY....."

Sean and Mai Ling are the two newest sales clerks in a busy butcher shop. They've only been there two weeks but already the difference in their work is clear to everyone.

As far as Sean was concerned, today had been the worst day yet. Here it was, only two o'clock, and it felt like he'd been there forever. He was rushed off his feet and everything was going wrong.

"How can I be expected to wrap this darn parcel properly if I can't even find the scissors?" he asked himself crossly, as he grabbed the nearest knife, cut the string and dropped the knife on the packing material. "Here you go," he smiled, handing the package to his waiting customer, only to watch, horrified, as the parcel unwrapped itself, sending the meat all over the counter. Sighing, he scooped it back up and started over.

Out of the corner of his eye, he saw that Mrs. Herriot, one of the regulars, was looking impatient. She must have been waiting ten minutes already, he groaned to himself. "Well, what'll it be today?" he asked, hurrying back to her.

"I think I'll take two pounds of stewing pork. How much is it?" she asked.

"Just a minute, I'll go check," he said, rushing off.

On his way, another customer interrupted. "Could you tell me where to find the pork hocks?" he asked. "Right over there," Sean pointed.

"I couldn't find them," the customer persisted. Sean turned back. Sure enough, when they got to the counter, Sean saw that they had run out of pork hocks. "I'll get some more from the back," he promised and started off.

When he came back with the meat, he noticed Mrs. Herriot. What was it she had wanted? Oh yes, the price of stewing pork. He hurried back with the information.

"Fine, I'll take two pounds," she said.

As he reached for the tray he realized, with a sinking sensation, that there wasn't enough. "I'll be right back with some more," he called over his shoulder, diving into the back room.

"You'll have to wait a minute, there's none cut," said Ferdie, the butcher, when Sean had explained his request. So Sean waited.

Five minutes later, when Sean got back, he noticed that Mrs. Herriot had disappeared. Oh, there she was, going to the cash with Mai Ling. He grabbed a pile of meat and rushed over to her. "Here you go Mrs. H.," he panted. "Is this what you wanted?"

Mrs. Herriot looked at him coldly. "Never mind," she said. "I got tired of waiting and decided to get some beef instead."

Sean felt angry. Grumbling, he walked back to his counter and looked around. Well, at least there weren't any customers at the moment. He supposed he should tidy up his counter a bit, but first he'd have a cigarette and relax.

Smoking his cigarette, he looked over at Mai Ling who was working busily behind the beef counter. She seemed to have a really easy time of it. "Look at her now, cleaning up her counter when it doesn't even need it," he thought to himself. "I guess it's easier on her side of the store. Probably no one buys beef any more. It's getting so expensive. That must be it." Still, he wondered.

At three o'clock, when he and Mai Ling went for coffee break together, the question was still on his mind. "You always look so cool, Mai Ling," he said. "I guess it just doesn't get as busy on your side of the shop. Like today when I was going crazy trying to do three things at once and that old Mrs. Herriot was down my back, I looked over at your section and there wasn't anyone waiting. How do you do it?"

"Well, I don't know, it got pretty busy at my counter for a while there!" Mai Ling answered, surprised. "I just don't let myself get upset. Instead, I concentrate on serving one customer at a time. I find that when I try to do more than that I get mixed up and forget what everyone wants. It just slows me down.

"I try to be prepared, too. When it slows down a bit, I check my trays to make sure there's lots of everything. That way I don't have to keep running to the back because I've run out of things. And I tidy up my packing area--make sure there's plenty of string and paper, find my scissors and pens, stuff like that.

"When I come in in the morning, I like to follow a regular routine. For example, I always start by cleaning and tidying up my counters, shelves and windows. That way I don't have to think about them later on. Then I read the price lists and try to memorize any changes. I find it saves time when customers come in because I don't have to keep checking. And I'm trying to learn where everything in the store is kept. That way I don't have to waste time searching for things. And once I've finished with something, like my knives or the scissors, I try to put them back in the same place each time. It makes it faster to find things."

Sean looked impressed. "So that's how come you always manage to look cool. Maybe I should try it!"

* *

THE NEXT STEPS

Below are some questions to help you analyze the differences between Sean's and Mai Ling's work methods. You could either ask a friend to read the story and discuss your answers together, or you could make short notes of your answers on a separate sheet of paper. PLEASE DO NOT WRITE IN THIS BOOK.

i. Appearance of Work

-- Was Sean concerned about the appearance of his work? Do you think the appearance is important? Why or why not?

-- What things could Sean do if he wanted to improve the neatness and tidiness of his work?

IF YOU WANT TO LEARN MORE ABOUT APPEARANCE OF WORK, TURN TO PAGE 31.

ii. Working Efficiently

-- Who do you think was more efficient, Sean or Mai Ling? Use examples from the story to show how that person worked efficiently.

-- Do you think it is important to do your work in an efficient way? Why or why not?

IF YOU WANT TO LEARN MORE ABOUT WORKING EFFICIENTLY, TURN TO PAGE 34.

iii. Quality of Work

-- Was there a difference in the quality of Sean's and Mai Ling's work? Give examples that illustrate your answer.

-- Do you think that it is important that your work meet acceptable standards of quality? Why or why not?

IF YOU WANT TO LEARN MORE ABOUT QUALITY OF WORK, TURN TO PAGE 37.

iv. Quantity of Work

-- Who do you think did more work on an average day, Sean or Mai Ling? Give reasons for your answer.

-- How would you go about judging whether you were producing a suitable quantity of work?

IF YOU WANT TO LEARN MORE ABOUT QUANTITY OF WORK, TURN TO PAGE 40.

1. Appearance of Work

People who are criticized for the poor appearance of their work or workspace often feel that their employers are making a fuss over nothing. "What difference does it make, after all!" is their typical response.

There are, in fact, several good reasons why employers stress the importance of maintaining a neat appearance. First of all, untidiness usually results in inefficiency--it slows the worker down. Sean, in the story, wasted time regularly because he couldn't find the scissors that were hidden under packaging materials. In a neatly organized workspace it is easier to find the materials you need at a moment's notice. This is doubly important when several people have to share the same materials and supplies. For example, if Sean and Mai Ling were expected to share one pair of scissors, Sean's carelessness would have slowed Mai Ling down as well. As well as wasting two people's time, this behavior would also make Mai Ling irritated because Sean's poor work habits were affecting her too. In other words, your untidiness can lead to friction between you and your co-workers.

Secondly, it is difficult to produce good quality work in dirty or untidy surroundings. If your work surface is dirty, some of the dirt will get onto the work itself. For example, if you cut fabric on a greasy surface, you will get spots on the cloth. It will then have to be thrown away or cleaned--either of which costs money. When your workspace is untidy, you may not notice hidden pens, glue or half-empty coffee cups until they blot your neatly finished work. In the end, you'll find it saves more time to take a few minutes to tidy up than to spend time later trying to clean up after the inevitable accident.

Finally, it is especially important to present a neat appearance if you work in a service occupation. Restaurant tables covered with dirty dishes, cluttered or dirty counters in stores, or a waiting room piled with junk, give customers a poor impression of the quality of the business. Clients are unlikely to return to such establishments and without customers there will be no jobs. The appearance of the workplace is therefore critical.

Clues for assessing your neatness

1. Do you seem to spend a lot of time looking for misplaced supplies or equipment?

2. When your boss asks you for something, does it take you a while to find it?

3. Do you often complain that you don't have enough space to put things or to do your work?

4. Do you often have to borrow supplies from other workers because you can't find yours?

5. Do you often have to throw away supplies or re-do work because it has become soiled?

If you have answered "Yes" to more than one of these questions, you should make an effort to improve your neatness. Below are some practical hints about things you can do to keep your workspace and your work neat and tidy.

Guidelines for Maintaining the Neat Appearance of Your Worksite

1. Organize your workspace so that there is a specific place for each type of material or equipment that you use regularly.

2. As soon as you have finished using something, put it back in its place. This only takes a second to do, and it makes it much easier to find things when you need them.

3. Get into the habit of cleaning up your workspace before leaving each evening. File your papers, put your equipment back where it belongs, and throw away any junk that has collected during the day--for example coffee cups, scraps of materials or paper, etc.

4. Keep your work surface and your hands clean. It makes better sense to spend two minutes cleaning up a spill or washing your hands than two hours re-doing work that has been damaged by dirt from the work surface.

ii. Working Efficiently

People almost always find it easier to do a good job if they follow a regular routine. Everyone develops routines, or habits as we commonly call them. Think about getting up in the morning, for example. Over the years, you have developed an order for doing things in the morning. Think about how disorganized you feel on the days that something happens to upset your regular schedule.

People develop routines because it saves both time and worry. In the preceding story, for example, Mai Ling found that by following a regular sequence of activities when she arrived at work each morning, she got her day off to a good start. She knew what she had to do and in what order. She didn't have to waste time each morning making the same decisions over and over again. Included in her morning routine was the gathering of information about price changes that she needed later in the day. Although it took a few extra minutes, it saved her time in the long run because she didn't have to keep checking.

One of the reasons that people are tense and nervous during the first few days in a new job is that they haven't learned the routine yet. In many jobs, the routine is organized for you and all you have to do is learn and follow it. If there isn't a set routine, you will have to develop one for yourself. At first, of course, your supervisor will tell you what to do after you have finished each task. After a few days, however, you are expected to carry out your duties without constant nagging.

You will find it easier to do this if you set yourself a schedule. By planning and following a regular pattern, you will be able to keep track of the things you have done and the things you have left to do. You won't worry about forgetting things and you will be able to keep on top of your work.

The golden rule to working efficiently is to plan before you act.

Clues for Assessing Your Efficiency

1. When you arrive at work, do you have to decide each day what you should do first?

2. Do you tend to forget to do things you are expected to do?

3. Do you find that you have to make several trips to the same place each day because you have forgotten things?

4. Do you jump from task to task, even when your work doesn't require it?

5. Do you often seem to be the only one to have spells when you are rushed off your feet and spells when you have little to do?

If you have answered "Yes" to more than one of these questions, it would seem that you are not working as efficiently as you could be. Below are some practical hints about things you can do to organize your work more efficiently.

Guidelines for Doing your Work Efficiently

1. Make a list of the tasks you are expected to do each day, each week and each month. Sean and Mai Ling, for example, were expected to clean their workspaces, keep their counters well supplied with meat, prepare bills and take payments, and serve customers. In addition, once a week each of them was expected to balance the cash for the day and once a month they helped with checking the inventory. By listing the tasks and arranging a long-term schedule they would ensure that they could remember to perform all their required activities.

2. Arrange your tasks in the order that you plan to do them. Mai Ling, for instance, always began by cleaning her workspace. Next she filled her counters with the products she was responsible for. She next made sure that the packaging materials were ready to use. Then she read and memorized the price changes. If she still had some free time, she used it to learn where the other products in the store were kept or she asked her supervisor for more work.

3. When organizing your time, you should try to schedule your most important tasks for early in the day when you still feel fresh and rested. This way, if a particular project takes longer than expected, the most important things will be done.

4. Set aside a few minutes at the beginning or end of the day to check your supplies. Make a note of the things you need to get, then go to get them all at one time. Put them away in the place you have assigned to each item. This way you won't run out of things when you are in the middle of a task.

5. Try to save routine tasks for later in the day when you are feeling tired or when there is a slack period. For example, routine phone calls, filing, straightening out supply cabinets or reading reports are the types of tasks that can often be assigned for periods when you are not feeling in top form.

6. Take advantage of quiet times to do work that requires special concentration, to catch up on routine tasks that have slipped behind, or to get ahead on your work for the next day. Many people use slack time to gossip, to run personal errands or to stare vacantly into space. The usual result is that a few hours later you find yourself under great pressure to get several things done at once. Often, several of the rush tasks could have been done earlier if you had planned ahead a bit.

7. Keep a list of tasks that need doing but that aren't urgent. Then, when you have a few minutes, you will have something useful to do. Many people complain that time passes slowly when they aren't busy. Your list will remind you of tasks that need doing.

8. If you really have nothing to do, ask your supervisor for more work. There are almost always tasks that need doing and your supervisor will appreciate your help.

iii. Quality of Work

In every job, your employer expects that the quality of work that you produce will meet acceptable standards. Usually people produce poor quality work not because they can't do better but because they can't be bothered to do their best. Perhaps they don't like their jobs, maybe they think that a few mistakes don't matter, or sometimes they are more concerned about getting their work done quickly than with doing it well.

Quality is important. First of all, the mistakes you make can cause problems for other workers or increase company costs. This is particularly obvious on a production line. Let us take the example of Bill, who works in a bakery loading conveyor belts with buns. The conveyor belts run through machines that ice the buns. If Bill jogs the trays when he loads them onto the belts, the buns get thrown out of place and don't get iced properly. The next workers in the sequence, who inspect and package the buns, must then remove all the spoiled buns. This makes extra work for them and it also causes increased wastage. By taking the extra moment to ensure that the quality of his work is high, Bill can help improve the overall productivity of his unit.

In some sense, in almost every job, the individual worker is part of a production line. We are all dependent on the work of others in the organization. Take a few minutes to think about where your work fits into the work of others in your organization. You will soon realize that the quality of your work affects the overall production of the organization you work for. This is why employers demand that each individual worker produce good quality work.

Clues for Assessing the Quality of Your Work

1. If you make a mistake do you let it go, thinking that someone else will find it?

2. Do you fail to double-check your work because you assume that you have done it correctly the first time?

3. Do you tend to rush through your work as quickly as possible?

4. Does your supervisor criticize you for sloppy or inaccurate work?

5. When doing routine tasks, do you find that you let your thoughts wander?

If you have answered "Yes" to more than one of these questions, you should make an effort to improve the quality of your work. Below are some guidelines that may help you improve.

Guidelines for Improving the Quality of Your Work

1. Before starting a task, make sure you understand the instructions. Clearly, if you don't know what you are supposed to be doing, it will be sheer luck if you do it correctly. Write down the instructions or repeat them to your supervisor to make sure you have understood. Ask questions if you don't. If you are really unsure, do one example, then take it to your supervisor to check that you are on the right track before doing the whole batch.

2. The first few times you do a new task, follow the instructions exactly. Only when you are completely familiar with the work should you start looking for short cuts.

3. From time to time, check back over your instructions to make sure you haven't forgotten anything. It is easy to slip into bad habits or sloppy work procedures.

4. Concentrate on doing your work correctly. If your mind is on other things you are more likely to make mistakes. And you won't notice your mistakes unless you are concentrating on what you are doing.

5. Before you pass your work to the next person, double-check it. Everyone makes mistakes from time to time. Therefore it is worth spending the few minutes it takes to check over your completed tasks. It is particularly important to check your work the first few times you perform a new activity.

6. Be aware of and deal with problems you encounter in your work. Sometimes, for example, you may find yourself in situations for which you have received no instructions. If the problem is a minor one try to solve it yourself. However, if it is something you don't feel comfortable solving, report it to your supervisor right away. Don't ignore it in the hope that it will disappear.

7. Accept the fact that you are responsible for the quality of your work. Don't look for excuses or blame others for your mistakes.

iv. Quantity of Work

To an employer, quantity of work is just as important as quality. In an organization, a slow worker can cause just as many problems as a careless one, because everyone depends on the work of someone else. This is most easily shown if we think about workers on a production line. Let's take the example of Bill, the bakery worker. His job is loading the conveyor belts with buns for icing. If he is slow getting the buns out of the oven, the next batch of buns for baking is held up. If he is slow loading the trays of buns onto the conveyor belt, the people who inspect and package the buns once they have been iced are forced to be idle. His individual actions can affect everyone involved in the production of iced buns. Therefore he has a responsibility to work both quickly and steadily.

In many jobs, employers set formal quantity standards by means of production quotas. Workers are expected to produce a certain number of goods or to perform a certain number of tasks in a set period of time. In other occupations, workers are paid for piece-work--that is, their income is based on the number of items they produce. Even when employers do not formally state their standards, they generally expect workers who are doing similar types of work to produce approximately the same quantity of work. For example, in the butcher shop, in the preceding story, both Sean and Mai Ling would be expected to serve about the same number of customers or to have similar total volumes of sales.

Generally, you should aim to produce about the same quantity of work as the people you work with. If you are very slow, you will interfere with the work of others. As well, they will come to resent the fact that you aren't doing your share. At the same time, if you produce twice as much as the other workers, you will also cause problems at the next stage in the process. For example, if Bill overloads the conveyor belt with buns, he can cause the machine to jam, or make it difficult for the packagers to deal with the increased flow. Moreover, since such overproduction often occurs at the expense of decreased quality, you are no further ahead in the long run. At work, you are part of a team and you have a responsibility to the other team members. Your aim should be to do your fair share of the work quickly and well.

Clues for Assessing the Quantity of Your Work

1. Do you always seem to have a backlog of work?

2. Do you often have to stay late to finish your daily work?

3. Does the person who receives your work usually come to collect it before you have finished?

4. Do you usually meet your quotas or work deadlines?

5. Do you often have to ask for an extension to your deadline?

6. Has your supervisor criticized you for slowness or poor productivity?

7. Do the people you work with regularly produce more work than you?

8. Do you spend a lot of time gazing around or talking to others?

If you have answered "Yes" to more than one of these questions, you are probably producing an inadequate quantity of work during your regular work day. It is possible that your assigned workload is too high. To judge this, you should discuss the problem with your supervisor. However, if others in similar jobs have about the same amount of work and seem able to handle it, the problem is your poor productivity. Below are some guidelines to help you increase the quantity of work you produce.

Guidelines for Improving the Quantity of Work You Produce

1. Find out how much you are expected to produce. When you start a job, your supervisor will usually tell you what tasks you are responsible for. Make a list of these tasks and use it to prepare a daily schedule. If your supervisor does not give you specific instructions about the amount of work you should produce, you can find out what is expected by watching or asking the people you work with.

2. Plan a daily routine. Decide on the order in which you are going to do each of your assigned tasks and give yourself a time limit for each one. Having a routine helps you save time because you don't have to stop after each activity and decide what to do next.

3. Before you begin a task, make sure you have all the necessary materials and equipment. If you have to keep jumping up to find things you have forgotten or run out of, your productivity will decrease. By organizing yourself before you begin, you will find that you get more done in the same amount of time.

4. Work at a steady pace. It is easy to waste a lot of time jumping up to get things, making personal phone calls, making several unnecessary trips to the washroom, daydreaming, or chatting with other workers. You should try to avoid interruptions and keep your mind on the task at hand.

5. When you have finished one task, don't sit and wait for someone to tell you what to do next. Move on to the next activity you have planned as part of your daily routine. If you have finished your work for the day, you might either start on work that is due later or ask your supervisor for something to do.

6. Try to finish one task before beginning another. Each time you switch to a new activity, it takes a few moments to get your thoughts organized. Get yourself an in-basket, and ask people to leave their work there. Then finish what you are doing before starting on the next thing in the basket.

7. Try to avoid worrying about the work you have left to do. This is easier said than done, but if you have planned a realistic daily routine you should be able to get everything finished. Worrying about what's left to do just slows you down.

(b) CARE OF EQUIPMENT AND MATERIALS

"AFTER ALL, THE COMPANY CAN AFFORD IT....."

Renée was furious. "The equipment they give us around here is useless," she fumed to herself, giving the computer terminal a sharp kick. "Especially this machine. Something is always going wrong with it. Yesterday the data set wasn't working. This morning the paper jammed. Half the time it doesn't accept the sign-on sequence. And now it won't even start! The thing is a pain in the neck."

She flicked the 'power on' switch a couple of times, then stood and glared at the machine.

Just then Nadia walked by. "What's the trouble?" she asked consolingly, when she saw the expression on Renée's face.

"I don't know. The darn thing won't even start."

"Here, let me look," Nadia said helpfully. She tried the power switch, made sure the data set was hooked up, then walked to the back of the machine. "Here's our problem," she said after a moment. "Someone's unplugged it. Must have been the cleaning staff. There...it should work now." Sure enough, the terminal hummed happily.

"Thanks, Nadia. I wouldn't even have thought of anything so simple," Renée said, sitting herself down.

Things didn't seem to get any better during the day. When she went to copy her printout, the photocopy machine was out of paper. She tried loading it but it wouldn't work. She had to go get Mrs. Hansen to help. She knew it was part of her job to load the old machine, but she just couldn't seem to get it right. The paper always got jammed or she forgot to throw the right switch. It was easier to get someone else to do it.

Once the machine was loaded, she went to make her copies, feeling flustered. She was making 50 copies of each page. "At least I remembered to set it this time," she thought thankfully. While waiting for her copies she rushed back to her desk to grab a cigarette. When she got back to the machine, she noted with a sinking sensation that the copies were blank. She'd put the page in wrong side up! Looking guiltily over her shoulder, she threw the 50 blank pages into the waste basket. "I just won't write those copies into the record book," she decided. "After all, I didn't really make the copies and they don't ask us to list every page we have to throw away."

At 3:30 her boss went out, saying, "I'll be back in an hour, Renée." Great! Now she could get the paper and stuff that her roommate had asked her to bring home. "After all," she argued, justifying her actions to herself, "the company is making lots of money. They won't even notice that the stuff is missing. Besides, my roommate really needs it. She's just a student and she can't afford it like the company can." Gathering up several pads of paper, some typing paper, some pens, paper clips and pencils, she made a neat pile on her desk. "I'll just wrap them up in some of this brown paper," she thought, suiting her actions to her words. Halfway through her task, she got a creepy feeling in her neck and looked up.

There stood her boss, looking very stern. "Oh, you're back already. Was the meeting shorter than you expected?" Renée asked breathlessly, trying to hide what she was doing.

"What are you doing there, Renée?" he asked, ignoring her question.

"Oh, this....Well... you see... my roommate is a student and she asked me to bring some...uh...paper and stuff home..uh and..well...," her voice trailed off.

"Yes, I do see," Mr. Furniss answered, rather grimly. "I think you and I had better have a talk. Come into my office, please."

Renée sat nervously in the chair while Mr. Furniss looked out the window for a moment. Finally he turned and spoke. "I've been thinking for some time now that I should speak to you about your attitude towards company equipment and materials. You don't seem to understand that you have a responsibility to use them carefully and efficiently.

"For example, take the way you use the photocopy machine. I've noticed that you waste a lot of paper. And even though it's part of your job, you haven't learned to load it properly. So you are costing the company money in two ways. First, you are increasing the cost of supplies. Second, you are keeping another employee from her work. If everyone were like you, the company would go bankrupt.

"Now I have caught you stealing. Stealing company supplies and also company time. Everyone who works here, as well as everyone who buys our products, ends up having to pay for that kind of behavior.

"When you decided to help yourself to company supplies, you probably figured that the company was rich and could afford the loss. Imagine what would happen if everyone behaved like you.

"Now I'm going to give you one last chance. But I expect you to learn to operate the business machines properly and to stop wasting company supplies. Treat company materials as if they belonged to your best friend. You wouldn't steal from her or break her property.

"O.K.....You can go now. Just remember, next time you will lose your job."

* *

THE NEXT STEPS

Below are some questions about the treatment of company materials and equipment. Discuss your answers with a friend or write them on a separate sheet of paper. PLEASE DO NOT WRITE IN THIS BOOK.

1. In what ways did Renée misuse her company's supplies and equipment?

2. What would happen if every employee behaved like Renée?

3. Do you think it is a good idea to treat company materials as if they belonged to your best friend? Explain your answer.

FOR INFORMATION AND ADVICE ABOUT PROPER HANDLING OF COMPANY MATERIALS AND EQUIPMENT, TURN TO THE NEXT PAGE.

Care of Equipment and Materials - Discussion

In the preceding story, Renée showed her lack of concern about company equipment and materials by treating the equipment roughly, wasting supplies and stealing company materials. Like many people, she took the attitude that, "the company can afford it, after all."

Employers can't afford to keep employees like Renée. It costs them money to fix or replace equipment that is damaged or broken by careless workers. And supplies cost money too. Careless, wasteful and dishonest employees can, in the long run, cause the company to close its doors. Then Renée and her fellow employees would be out of a job.

Careless use of equipment and materials can affect you in other ways as well. If you use large or dangerous machinery without proper care, you can injure yourself or others. And if the equipment you are using is damaged, other employees cannot do their jobs either.

Clues for Assessing Your Use of Equipment and Materials

1. Do you wait until something goes wrong before you bother to read the operating instructions?

2. When a machine isn't working, do you kick or shake it to try to get it going again?

3. When you have finished with a piece of equipment, do you leave it lying around?

4. Do you "borrow" company supplies or equipment for your personal use?

If you have answered "Yes" to more than one of these questions, you should change your behavior regarding the use of company equipment and materials. Below are some practical hints about the way you ought to treat them.

Guidelines for Using Company Equipment and Materials

1. Before using a new piece of equipment, read the operating instructions and follow them carefully. If you are unsure about the correct way to run the machine, ask your supervisor or an experienced worker to show you how to do it.

2. Even if it takes longer, follow safety procedures when using equipment. Accidents happen to people who take chances. Remember, safety rules are based on previous accidents--and if it happened to someone else, it can happen to you. The rule is, the safe way is the right way.

3. When you have finished with tools or equipment, put them away or turn them off. This will keep them from getting lost, broken or wearing out.

4. If the equipment you are using doesn't seem to be working properly, report the problem to the person in charge right away. Often a minor flaw that is found early can save a major breakdown later. Also, it is difficult to produce high quality work if the equipment you are using is defective.

5. Don't waste company supplies. Renée, for example, wasted 50 sheets of paper by running the photocopy machine carelessly. Then she compounded her wastefulness by throwing the paper away. Paper, pens, erasers--all kinds of supplies--cost money.

6. Do not steal from the company. This costs everyone--workers and consumers alike. Stealing includes: stealing time from your work to run personal errands and so on, stealing supplies or equipment, and "borrowing" things for your own use. Remember that theft is against the law. Not only can you be fired for it, but also you can be prosecuted.

Chapter 3 / Working with People

INTRODUCTION

In almost every job, you will have to deal with other people. You are likely to have a boss, you may have co-workers, or you may be responsible for supervising the work of others. Even if you are self-employed, you will probably have to deal with customers or suppliers. Since it is almost impossible to escape from others, it is important to be able to work with them. In fact, in many cases, the way you deal with others is more important in keeping a job than the quality of your work itself. Getting along with others is more than just a nice idea; it is often a job requirement.

In this Sourcebook, working with people has been divided into two main categories--communications skills and human relations skills. These are the two main aspects to dealing with people in a work environment.

Communicating--giving and receiving instructions and feedback--is a skill that everyone uses every day. Naturally enough, everyone makes mistakes in communicating. For example, has your supervisor, teacher or parent ever complained that you didn't do what you were told? And have you heard yourself wail in reply, "But I did do what you asked!"? What we have in situations like this is "a failure to communicate."

Communicating is an important part of every job. Some people have a natural talent for effective communication; but for most of us it is a skill that we have to learn and practise consciously. Fortunately, there are simple and effective methods that individuals can use to improve their communications skills. There are ways to give instructions and feedback that won't offend other people. As well, there are methods for receiving instructions and feedback that will help you improve your work performance.

WORKING WITH PEOPLE

Effective human relations skills are also a vital part of doing your job well. For some people it comes very easily--they seem to have an inborn flair for getting along with others. Most of us, however, have to work a little bit at getting along with others; it doesn't just come naturally. And we tend to assume that as long as we do our own job, it's nobody's business how we get along with other people.

Employers, however, don't accept this argument. They point out that workers who make no effort to get along with other members of the work group cause all kinds of problems. Their selfish attitudes or abrasive personalities can lower the productivity of a whole unit and can cause serious morale problems. Employers may, in some cases, feel justified in ridding their organization of an employee who cannot or will not fit into the group.

This doesn't mean that you have to be everyone's best friend. Rather, it means that you must be co-operative. Everyone has personal likes and dislikes. Your goal is to make sure that your attitudes don't interfere with getting the job done. Once again, there are simple methods that anyone can learn for dealing with others. They are described in the following chapter.

IF YOU WANT TO LEARN MORE ABOUT COMMUNICATIONS SKILLS, GO TO PAGE 51.
IF YOU WANT TO LEARN MORE ABOUT HUMAN RELATIONS SKILLS, GO TO PAGE 70.

(a) COMMUNICATIONS SKILLS

There are four key parts to communicating in a work setting. On the supervisor's side, there is a need to give effective instructions and helpful positive and negative feedback. If supervisors fail to make clear what work they want done and how to do it, the quality and quantity of work produced in a department will not meet accepted standards. Also, if they do not know how to praise good performance or to correct mistakes effectively, they will make it difficult for their workers to assess the quality of their work and improve in their areas of weakness.

From the employee's point of view, the two essential skills needed are the ability to receive instructions and to accept feedback. If workers fail to pay attention to the instructions they are given, they will make needless errors in their work, with the result that their supervisors will become dissatisfied with their work performance. As well, when people make mistakes, they must be able to accept criticism and learn from it in order to improve their work.

The following story illustrates the importance of effective communications between supervisors and employees. The questions that follow the story are provided to help you think about how to improve your communications skills.

* *

"STOP, LOOK AND LISTEN..."

Still talking, Mrs. Gomez led her two newest coding clerks, Irma and Ranier, into a large sunny room that seemed, to them, to be filled with people, desks and filing cabinets. "Now that I've explained the purpose of our research and the meaning of the information we are collecting, I am sure you can see that it is vital that your work be done correctly and carefully," she smiled. "So I'll describe the routine that you are to follow in detail."

"In this filing cabinet," she said, taking them to it, "we keep all the questionnaires that are waiting to be coded. Mr. Bromley, who sits right here, is the control clerk. When the questionnaires come in, he assigns each of them a code number and records them in numerical order in the minute book

right here. He then creates a file and places it in numerical order in the filing cabinet. It is your job to code all the information on the questionnaires. Each of you has been given a code book that tells you what codes to use for each answer that comes along.

"On your desk you have two work baskets. Put the uncoded files in the left-hand basket. Code only one questionnaire at a time and code it through completely from beginning to end. When you have finished it, put it in your right-hand basket. If you run into a coding problem, bring it to me right away. Don't try to go on with the questionnaire because later codes may be affected by the one you are having trouble with. My office is right over there and I'm always happy to answer your questions.

"When you have completed all five questionnaires, take them back to Mr. Bromley's desk. In the third column of the minute book, write your initials and the date. Then put them in the 'work completed' basket on his desk. Don't file them back into the filing cabinet yourself."

Mrs. Gomez paused for a moment, then asked brightly, "Any questions?" Irma shook her head.

"Oh no, it's all perfectly clear," she answered quickly.

Then Ranier spoke. "May I just make sure I caught it?" he asked. "We start by taking the files from the cabinet. We sign them out in this minute book here. Then we take them to our desks and put them in the left-hand basket. We work on them one at a time and when we've finished with each one we put it in our out-basket. When we've finished with all five, we take them back to this desk and sign them back in. Then we put them in the 'completed' basket. Then we take five more. Is that it?"

"You seem to have understood perfectly," smiled Mrs. Gomez. "It's quite simple, really. I don't think you'll have any trouble. Well, let's get started. Irma, could you begin please?"

Hearing her name, Irma jumped. "I'm sorry," she said, "I didn't hear what you said."

"I asked you to start by showing us what you would do first," came the reply.

Irma hesitated, then walked to the filing cabinet. Opening it, she asked, "Now how many did you say we were supposed to take?"

After a silence, Ranier answered, "Five."

"Oh, yes, that's right," she said, taking them out. Next she walked over to the minute book and looked up the file numbers.

"Don't forget to put your initials in the second column," reminded Mrs. Gomez, as Irma started recording the number of the second file.

Once they were settled at their desks and the coding system had been explained, Mrs. Gomez left them, saying, "Remember, do the questionnaires one at a time. If you run into coding problems or if you have any questions, just come over and ask me for help. When you've finished all five, bring them over to me this first time, so we can check them together."

During the next couple of hours, Ranier went to see Mrs. Gomez a few times, when he wasn't quite sure that he was coding answers correctly. Finally the fourth time he appeared, he started with an apology, "I'm sorry to keep bothering you like this."

Mrs. Gomez answered seriously, "No, there is no need to apologize. I'd rather you came and asked questions when you weren't sure what to do. It is much better for all of us if you do it correctly from the beginning. That way, you don't get into bad habits and we don't have to spend time looking for errors."

As she spoke, Mrs. Gomez glanced over the questionnaire Ranier had brought her. She noted, with satisfaction, that he had correctly coded one of the more difficult problems, and remarked, "I see you've coded question three correctly here, Ranier. It's a tricky one, and you did well to understand the procedure. I'm glad to see you're following my instructions."

Ranier replied, "Thank you, Mrs. Gomez. I was wondering about that one and I'm glad I got it right." He smiled as he walked back to his desk.

Irma, on the other hand, didn't appear once all morning, Mrs. Gomez noted to herself with a touch of surprise. Once though, when she glanced in at them, she found Irma standing at Ranier's desk. Walking by, she overheard Irma saying, "I've forgotten what she said about coding question six. Do you remember?"

Just before lunch, Mrs. Gomez went up to Ranier's desk. "Well, how is it going? How many questionnaires have you completed, Ranier?" she asked.

"Four," came the reply. "And I don't have any problems at the moment, thanks."

Going over to Irma, Mrs. Gomez asked the same question.

"Well, I've finished one and I'm working on three more at the moment," was the response.

Mrs. Gomez looked annoyed. "Irma, I asked you to do them one at a time. I want you to complete each one before going on to the next," she pointed out.

"Well, I think it's silly to do it like that," argued Irma, jutting her chin forward aggressively. "If I do the same question for all the questionnaires at the same time I go faster because I can remember the code numbers."

Mrs. Gomez looked at Irma silently for a moment, then spoke firmly. "Irma, I asked you to do the questionnaires one at a time and that is the way I want it done. Now, I have several reasons for preferring that method, which I will explain in a moment. But first, I want you to understand that you must follow the instructions I give you. If, after a while when you have some experience in the work, you come up with ideas about how to do it differently, I will be pleased to hear them. I, too, want to get the work done as quickly as possible. But I don't want you to change things without discussing the changes with me first. And I think you should find out why things are done in a particular way rather than just assuming that the instructions you have been given are silly."

* *

How Well Do You Read and Remember?

Here are some qustions about the story you have just read. Do not go back and read the story again. Each question has five possible answers. On a separate sheet of paper, write the question number and the letter that represents the best answer. PLEASE DO NOT WRITE IN THIS BOOK.

1. The name of the supervisor in the story was:
   (a) Mr. Bromley (b) Irma (c) Mrs. Gormley (d) Ranier (e) Mrs. Gomez

2. The number of questionnaires that each clerk was to take from the filing cabinet at any one time was:
   (a) One (b) Three (c) Five (d) Six (e) Ten

3. Which of the following tasks were the coding clerks told to do first in the sequence?
   (a) Assign each questionnaire a code number.
   (b) File the questionnaire in the filing cabinet.
   (c) Sign out the files in the minute book.
   (d) Take the required number of files from the filing cabinet.
   (e) Insert the new pages into the coding book.

4. At the end of the morning how many questionnaires had Irma completed?
   (a) Four (b) One (c) Five (d) Six (e) Ten

5. Why did Irma work on more than one questionnaire at one time?
   (a) Because that was what she was told to do.
   (b) Because that was what she thought she was told to do.
   (c) Because that was what Ranier told her to do.
   (d) Because she thought that it was faster to do it that way.
   (e) Because she wanted to make her supervisor angry.

(continued...)

Now compare your answers to those at the bottom of this page. How well did you do? If you got any wrong, you should try to improve your reading habits by paying more attention to what you read. It could be important when you are reading instructions or directives on the job.

THE NEXT STEPS

Below are some questions to help you assess the communications skills of the various people in the preceding story. You could either ask a friend to read the story and discuss your answers together or you could make a short note of your answers on a separate sheet of paper. PLEASE DO NOT WRITE IN THIS BOOK.

i. Giving Instructions

-- Do you think Mrs. Gomez explained clearly what she wanted done? Explain your answer.

-- What should she have done differently?

-- If you were Mrs. Gomez, how would you have explained the required tasks?

IF YOU WANT TO LEARN MORE ABOUT GIVING INSTRUCTIONS, GO TO PAGE 58.

ii. Giving Feedback

-- In the preceding story, Mrs. Gomez praised Ranier for work he had done correctly. Do you think giving praise is important? Why or why not?

-- Do you think Mrs. Gomez was fair to correct Irma for failing to follow instructions?

-- Do you think Mrs. Gomez handled the situation properly? Why or why not? What would you have done if you were Mrs. Gomez?

IF YOU WANT TO LEARN MORE ABOUT GIVING FEEDBACK, GO TO PAGE 61.

Answers 1 (e); 2 (c); 3 (d); 4 (b); 5 (d).

iii. Receiving Instructions

-- Who followed instructions better, Irma or Ranier?

-- Do you think that Irma listened carefully to Mrs. Gomez's instructions? Use examples from the story to prove your answer.

-- List all the things Ranier did that showed he paid attention to the instructions he was given.

IF YOU WANT TO LEARN MORE ABOUT RECEIVING INSTRUCTIONS, GO TO PAGE 64.

iv. Receiving Feedback

-- Did Ranier react well to Mrs. Gomez's praise for his work? How do you think you would react in a similar situation?

-- How do you think Irma felt when she was corrected?

-- If you were in Irma's place, how would you have answered Mrs. Gomez? Explain your reasons.

IF YOU WANT TO LEARN MORE ABOUT RECEIVING FEEDBACK, GO TO PAGE 67.

i. Giving Instructions

Giving instructions successfully is an art. There is a lot more to it than just telling someone to do something. Say you told me to take the galleys to the printer's right away. Before I could follow this instruction, I would have to know what galleys were. Then I would have to know which printer was meant. Then I would have to figure out whether right away meant in five minutes, within the hour, or to drop everything and grab my coat. To answer this last question I would want to know why the task was so urgent. In other words, instructions must be both informative and precise. Even more important, they should be worded in such a way that you convince the listener to co-operate willingly. Giving instructions involves both what is said and how it is said.

Clues for Assessing How Well You Give Instructions

1. Do you plan what you are going to say before you say it?

2. Do your employees ask questions about or comment on your instructions?

3. Do your workers carry out your instructions the way you expected them to?

4. Do you show your employees an example of what you want done?

If you have answered "No" to more than one of these questions, you may well need to improve your way of giving instructions. Although each person will behave differently, there are some basic rules that everyone should follow in order to make sure that they are giving instructions effectively. These guidelines are listed below.

Guidelines for Giving Instructions

1. Plan what you want to say before giving instructions. Take a few minutes to write down what you want done and why. This will give you a chance to put your thoughts in order.

2. Start your instructions by explaining or reviewing the purpose of the task. If people don't understand why they are doing something, they are more likely to make mistakes or misunderstand instructions. Moreover, when people understand the goal of their work, they take more pride in doing it well, and they may even come up with better ways of performing the task.

3. Organize your instructions in the sequence you want the task done. Start by saying what you want done first, then second and so on. This way, the pattern of the work will be clear to the listener. For example, in the preceding story, Mrs. Gomez explained the process of obtaining, completing and returning the questionnaires in the order that the work was to be done.

4. Use concrete examples when explaining a task. Rather than just describing what you want done, show the listener a real example. If possible, provide your listener with the chance to try the task himself or herself while you watch. People learn more quickly by doing than by listening.

5. Leave yourself plenty of time for instructions and explanations. If you are in a hurry, you often forget to say important things. Because you are rushing you are likely to be disorganized or vague in explaining what you want done. As well, your haste shows itself to your listener, who is likely to react by getting nervous and failing to catch on to what you are saying.

6. Give instructions in a relaxed, patient and pleasant manner. People react as much to the tone of voice as to the words themselves. Therefore, it is important that your non-verbal cues be positive. If you are tense, anxious or angry, you will spark similar emotions in your listeners.

7. Avoid criticism and negative words when giving instructions. If you start complaining about the way things have been done in the past, your listeners will spend their time thinking up excuses rather than listening to your suggested changes.

8. Encourage your listeners to ask questions about instructions they don't understand. One useful technique for checking that your instructions have been grasped is to ask someone to summarize your remarks; another is to ask someone to demonstrate the task you've just explained. Mrs. Gomez, in the preceding story, used this technique to see whether Irma had understood her instructions.

9. Expect resistance and deal with it sympathetically. Most people's first reaction to a change is negative. If you give them a chance to voice their reservations, you give yourself the opportunity to persuade them to co-operate. And when people co-operate willingly rather than because they feel they are being forced to, they do a better job in a shorter time.

10. Show a positive attitude to your listeners. If you think that the people who work for you are slow and stupid, you aren't likely to be disappointed. If, however, you treat them as responsible, mature adults, you will find that the large majority behave responsibly. If your employees regularly fail to follow your instructions, ask yourself what you did wrong before you blame them.

11. Take the time to check the work of your employees and make sure they understood and are following your instructions. In this way, you can confirm the effectiveness and clarity of your instructions.

ii. Giving Feedback

To be successful, feedback should be constructive. There are two aspects to feedback: praising good work performance and correcting faults. Both are equally important.

Most people find it easier to give praise than criticism. Therefore, this section will concentrate on describing how to give negative feedback (criticism). When giving criticism, you should begin by identifying the nature of the problem, then specify the desired result and open a discussion on ways to achieve the intended result. Because almost everyone reacts defensively when criticised, it takes tact, patience, firmness and sensitivity to achieve positive results from your criticisms. Criticism should never be given in anger; nor should it attack the personality of the recipient. Yet it is essential that supervisors provide feedback about their employees' work. Everyone makes mistakes, everyone has areas in which they can improve, and everyone needs to be told what their problems are and how they can be corrected.

Clues for Assessing How You Give Feedback

1. Do you tend to overlook or ignore problems in the hope that they will go away or sort themselves out?

2. Do you give criticism when you are angry or upset about errors?

3. Do you criticize an individual when others are present?

4. Do you refuse to listen to the excuses or explanations of the person you are criticizing?

5. Are you more willing to criticize poor performance than to praise good work?

If you have answered "Yes" to any of these questions, you should improve your methods of giving feedback. The purpose of positive feedback is to reinforce

successful behaviors. The main reason for giving criticism is to change the unsuitable behaviors of the recipient. The guidelines given below are intended to suggest techniques that will help you to give constructive feedback.

Guidelines for Giving Feedback

1. Give feedback promptly and often. You, as supervisor, are responsible for making sure that your instructions are understood and followed. Therefore, it is important to check and correct the work of your employees regularly. This is especially important after you have given new instructions. Start by giving positive feedback--praise people for work well done. In this way, you can improve their self-esteem by pointing out approved behaviors. This will make it easier for them to accept and correct their weaknesses. Then explain any criticism(s) you have, using neutral words and concrete examples.

2. Give criticism in private. If you are dissatisfied with the work performance or the attitude of one employee, do not criticize the individual in front of others. Embarrassing the person by public criticism only worsens the situation. Not only will the person who is criticized tend to react defensively, but other listeners will tend to sympathize with their colleague.

3. Give criticism verbally before putting it in writing. This gives your worker a chance to improve. Quite often, people tend to assume that if no one has complained about their behavior, there isn't a problem. You owe it to your employees to give them a warning before giving them a black mark that will go on their record.

4. Give criticism in a neutral, objective manner. If you lose your temper or attack the individual's personality, you will only succeed in making the person angry and defensive. This will not solve the problem; it will only make it worse. Therefore, never give criticism when you are angry. Also, take some time to sort out your thoughts and identify possible solutions before you speak to the person.

5. Make your criticism specific. Explain exactly what the person is doing wrong and illustrate your point with examples from his/her work or behavior. Then explain what you expect the person to do instead.

6. Give the individual the opportunity to defend himself or herself. People need the chance to explain themselves. They may, in fact, have sound justifications for their behavior. To be fair, you must listen to their remarks. If you don't allow them this release, they are likely to feel resentful and unwilling to change.

7. Explain the consequences of their failure to improve. Vague or implied threats make people nervous. They would rather know precisely what to expect if they don't change. As well, when and if they repeat the unacceptable behavior, you can easily follow through with the previously specified consequences.

iii. Receiving Instructions

The ability to listen to and follow instructions is an essential job skill. There are two aspects to this. First, you are expected to pay attention to and remember the instructions you are given. If you let your mind wander or if you interrupt to argue before your supervisor has finished speaking, you won't even hear what is said. How can you carry out an instruction if you haven't heard it?

The second part of receiving instructions is carrying them out. Many people behave like Irma, the coding clerk in the preceding story, who didn't follow her instructions because she thought they were silly. When you start a new job or task, you are expected to follow the instructions you have been given. Only later, when you have gained some experience with the task, should you make changes. Even then, you have a responsibility to discuss your proposals with your supervisor before going ahead with a new method. There may well be good reasons for the procedure, even though you are unaware of them. It is a wise policy to assume that your supervisor knows what s/he is talking about.

Clues for Assessing How Well You Receive Instructions

1. Has your supervisor criticized you for failing to do what you were told?

2. Do you often have to ask co-workers to explain the instructions after your supervisor has left?

3. Do you often find yourself thinking about other things when your supervisor is explaining a task?

4. Do you usually think that the instructions you are being given are silly or wrong?

If you have answered "Yes" to any of these questions, you may need to improve your skills at listening to and following instructions. The guidelines below will give you ideas about methods you can use to improve.

Guidelines for Receiving Instructions

1. When you are being given instructions, always stop what you are doing to listen. People who try to do two things at once usually end by doing both tasks poorly. As well, this behavior is rude and will certainly annoy the speaker.

2. Pay attention to what you are being told. In order to understand the instructions, it is important to concentrate. If you let your mind wander, if you daydream, or if you spend your time looking at how other people are reacting, you won't hear what is being explained.

3. If an instruction seems unclear, ask your supervisor about it after s/he has finished speaking. If you have no questions, this is a good time to summarize what has been said to make sure you understood. In the story you just read, Ranier used this technique effectively. The technique has several advantages for you. First, it shows that you were listening. Second, it gives your supervisor a chance to correct any misunderstandings you may have. Third, it helps you remember the procedure.

4. Do not interrupt the speaker during his/her explanation. Save your questions until the end. Often, something that is unclear at first will be explained by the speaker. If you interrupt, both you and the speaker lose your trains of thought. Interruptions often breed more confusion than clarification.

5. As soon as possible, make a note of the instructions you have received. Writing them down has several benefits. First, it helps you remember what was said. Second, it gives you something to refer to if you later forget what was said. Third, by writing down the instructions you will often become aware of points that you don't quite understand before the problem arises. Finally, if your work is criticized later, you can show your supervisor what you thought the instructions were.

6. Even if you are certain you understood the instruction, bring the first completed example of your work to your supervisor. This practice will save you both time and worry. If you are making a mistake, you can easily correct it and you won't have formed bad habits. And if you are doing it correctly, you will remove that lingering sense of doubt.

7. Don't argue about or criticize the instructions until you are certain they are incorrect. Begin by assuming that they are both correct and sensible. They probably are, you know.

iv. Receiving Feedback

Almost everyone finds it difficult to accept feedback gracefully. Praise tends to embarrass us and our natural reaction to criticism is to become angry or defensive. This is especially true if we have a sneaking suspicion that the criticism was deserved. Yet without feedback, it is difficult to improve. Praise helps us understand what we are doing well and why. On the other hand, in a work situation, everyone makes mistakes and it is our supervisor's duty to correct our errors. Everyone needs to learn how to accept and learn from both positive and negative feedback.

Clues for Assessing How Well You Receive Feedback

1. When your work is being criticized, do you interrupt to argue with the assessment?

2. Do you assume that any criticism of your work is a reflection on your competence?

3. When you are being criticized, do you respond with the first thing that comes to mind?

4. Do you wish later that you hadn't reacted the way you did to criticism?

5. When your work is praised, do you tend to think it was just luck?

If you answered "Yes" to any of these questions, you would be well-advised to try to improve the way you react to feedback. Dealing with feedback is an inevitable part of working. Don't forget that everyone receives criticism about their work. There are ways of accepting it that will make it easier on both you and the person who is giving it. The guidelines below suggest things you can do to improve your reactions.

Guidelines for Receiving Feedback

1. When your work is praised, make an effort to understand exactly what you did well. For example, if the neatness of your work is singled out, you will learn that neatness is an important quality in your work. If it is your ability to solve problems that receives recognition, this shows you that your supervisor welcomes and approves of your judgement.

2. Listen to negative feedback without interrupting. Concentrate on understanding what is being said. Sometimes it helps to pretend that it is someone else's work that is being criticized. Try to keep your emotions at a distance while you think about the point that is being raised.

3. Make sure that you understand criticism by summarizing what you think you heard. By doing this, you make sure that both you and your supervisor are talking about the same problem. When people are criticized, they often misunderstand what is being said. Therefore it is useful to make sure that both people are talking about the same thing.

4. Before you begin to defend yourself, apologize. You don't have to say you were wrong if you believe you weren't, but you can at the very least say that you are sorry for the misunderstanding. The person who is criticizing you is probably somewhat anxious also. By showing that you have your emotions under control, you can make the situation less tense.

5. If you are upset, ask for a few minutes to calm yourself before continuing the conversation. When you are angry or hurt, you cannot explain yourself properly and you may make the situation worse.

6. Make an effort to find out exactly what your supervisor wants you to do differently. It is not enough to understand the problem; you and your supervisor must agree on a solution.

7. Keep your emotions under control. Bite your tongue, count to ten, and keep quiet until you have regained your temper. If you say the first thing that comes to mind, you will almost inevitably wish you hadn't.

8. When you realize that you have been at fault, apologize. You will feel better about yourself and your supervisor will feel better about you.

9. Refrain from blaming other workers for errors. It's not helpful, and it can sound as though you're trying to avoid your responsibilities. Besides, the person making the complaint often won't care who made the mistake; s/he just wants it corrected.

(b) H U M A N R E L A T I O N S S K I L L S

The way you get along with people at work can spell the difference between success and failure on the job. If you find yourself in constant conflict, not only will you become less and less happy with the job, but also your employer will become more and more dissatisfied with your work performance.

Basically there are four categories of relationships in the workplace. These are relationships with supervisors; relationships with co-workers; relationships with staff; and relationships with customers or clients. Although most workers deal only with supervisors and co-workers as a regular part of their job, all four categories will be discussed in this section of the Sourcebook.

The following stories illustrate the importance of good human relations skills in getting along on the job. The questions at the end of the stories are designed to help you think about ways to improve your skills in this important area.

* *

"WELL, HE'S THE BOSS..."

"Nathan, Arnie, could you both come to my desk right away!" called Mr. Liebowicz, as he rushed into the office. Surprised, Arnie looked up, put down his pen and got up. Nathan didn't move. After a few moments, Mr. Liebowicz called Nathan again. Grumbling, Nathan looked up.

"I'll just be a couple of minutes," he said.

"No, right away please," emphasized the boss.

"Okay, okay," Nathan growled. "How am I supposed to get anything done around here if I'm constantly interrupted," he complained, as he slowly got up and went over to the desk.

"Sorry to disturb you fellows like this," apologized Mr. Liebowicz pleasantly, "but we have a rush job for the printers. I would like the two of you to stop what you are doing for the moment and proofread these galleys. They are needed for noon. That gives you three hours. If you hurry, I'm sure you can get it done," he finished, handing them the typeset sheets.

"What should I do if the Ad Manager comes in about that rush job I'm working on for him?" asked Arnie, taking the work.

"Good point, Arnie. Send him to me," came the reply.

Nathan was blunter. "There's no way I'm doing this," he argued, looking sullenly at the boss. "I'm too busy. I've got three things going now and if you keep on changing my job, I'll never get any of them finished. Get someone else to do this!"

"Watch yourself, Nathan," Mr. Liebowicz warned. "Your attitude isn't appreciated. I'm sorry to interrupt you but it's your turn for the rush jobs today. So get going." As the supervisor turned away, Nathan clenched his fists and took a step forward.

Fortunately for him, Arnie took his arm and said, "Well, I guess we'd better get started. Shall we work at your desk or mine? How about we get a coffee from the machine before we start?"

As they walked towards the machine, Nathan was still seething. "I don't know how you can put up with that guy, Arnie. So help me, one of these days I'm just going to let him have it. And don't pretend you like him any better than I do. I know you think he's a jerk."

"Well, he is hard to take at times," Arnie agreed. "But I've worked for a lot worse people. He really sticks up for his team and he's fair. I guess he gets a lot of pressure from the higher-ups. He's not the type of guy I'd choose for a friend but I respect him. The way he gives orders sometimes is a pain, but you have to admit, it <u>is</u> our turn for a rush job."

"I don't think he's fair," argued Nathan. "He treats me a lot worse than the others--he's always picking on me!"

"Well, I'm not sure about that," Arnie replied. "It's true you and he argue more. But I get the feeling it's because of the way you react. You always get mad."

"Sure I get mad," said Nathan heatedly. "That guy is always pushing me around. I have to stick up for myself, don't I?"

"Look Nathan, I don't want to argue with you," Arnie said pleasantly. "Sure, I know you find the guy hard to take. But there are ways and ways of disagreeing with him. I don't know about you, but I want to keep this job. I understand how you feel about the boss, but I don't think you're doing yourself any favours getting mad all the time. You'll get yourself into real trouble one of these days if you keep it up. Anyway, I guess we'd better get back to work or he'll be ticked off with both of us."

* *

"IT'S A HARD DECISION TO MAKE, BUT..."

Alison Binks, the manager of a small travel agency, was facing a difficult decision. Business had been slow for the last couple of months and there were no signs of improvement. She was going to have to let one of her employees go. But which one? Of course it wouldn't be either Madeleine or Denis. They had both been with her for about three years now and she had no complaints about either one. So her choice was between Sadie and Charlotte.

Sadie had been there a few months longer and there was no question that she did work quickly and efficiently. She was really fast at planning trips and making all the reservations and arrangements. And there had never been any foul-ups with her work. She knew where everything was, her information files were always complete and up-to-date, and she never seemed to forget even the most picky details.

But Alison had noticed that Sadie didn't get along too well with the other people in the office, or customers either, for that matter. Take that phone call Alison had received from an angry customer just last week. The lady had been really annoyed. She said that Sadie had been rude and had acted like she was doing the lady a favour by taking her money. Alison had managed to calm the woman down but it had taken time. When she talked to Sadie about the incident, Sadie didn't seem at all concerned. Of course, Sadie had a point--the lady didn't know what she wanted, kept changing her plans and was generally difficult to deal with. Still, Sadie had to realize that the customer was always right.

It wasn't that Sadie was shy or reserved. It was more that she was snobbish and unhelpful. She gave the impression that she thought she was better than everyone else. For example, she would never share any of her information with the other agents. And when there was a rush of work, she did her own, but she never offered to help anyone else.

With Charlotte it was a different story. She was always so cheerful--a real delight to have around. Alison had noticed that her clients always came back and asked for her, even when she had made mistakes in their travel arrangements. The other employees really liked her too. She was always willing to go to get the coffee, for example, and she had a friendly word for anyone who looked tense or unhappy. She always helped out, too, when one of the others was swamped.

No, her work wasn't as perfect as Sadie's. She had made one or two errors, though they had always been caught before any serious damage had been done. And it took her a bit longer to arrange and complete travel plans.

Alison debated with herself for several days. "After all, I'm not running a drop-in centre or a popularity contest," she argued with herself. "Sadie is the more productive worker and she has been here longer. I have no complaints about her work and I'm not sure it would be fair to let her go because I don't like her."

Quite suddenly, the matter was settled. On Friday morning, the deadline she had set for herself, she was greeted by an unhappy-looking Madeleine. "Please, Ms. Binks, can I have a few minutes to talk with you?" Madeleine asked.

"Why certainly, just give me ten minutes, then come and see me."

Madeleine came in looking upset but determined and handed Alison a letter. "What's this, you are leaving," Alison said, shocked, after glancing at the letter of resignation. "Why, what's the problem?"

"I'm sorry, but I think it's the best thing to do," Madeleine replied, close to tears.

"Well, this is too bad," said Alison. "I've always been very pleased with your work and I thought you liked it here. Can you tell me why you've come to this decision? Do you have another job? Maybe there is something I can do to change your mind."

Madeleine shook her head, saying, "No, I don't have another job."

"Well, would you be willing to tell me what's bothering you," Alison asked gently. "I don't want you to leave, you know."

Madeleine looked very unhappy. When she spoke at last, her voice shook. "Well, I don't like to complain, I really don't. And I don't like to talk about people behind their backs."

Suddenly Alison knew. "It's Sadie, isn't it?" she asked. "No, don't feel badly, you didn't have to say anything. I've noticed the problem. Please leave it with me and I'll deal with the matter. I had been planning to do so today anyway. And don't feel guilty; I should have done this sooner."

* *

THE NEXT STEPS

Below are some questions about the human relations skills shown by the people in the preceding stories. You could either ask a friend to read the stories and discuss your answers together or you could make short notes of your answers on a separate sheet of paper. PLEASE DO NOT WRITE IN THIS BOOK.

i. Working with Supervisors

-- Did you agree with the advice that Arnie gave to Nathan? Why or why not?

-- If you were Nathan, how would you have reacted to the new assignment?

-- What things do you think you should do in order to get along with your supervisor?

IF YOU WANT TO LEARN MORE ABOUT WORKING WITH SUPERVISORS, GO TO PAGE 76.

ii. Dealing with Co-workers

-- Who do you think would be easier to work with, Arnie or Nathan? Give reasons for your answer.

-- Madeleine was going to quit because she found Sadie so difficult to deal with. Do you believe that an unpleasant co-worker can have this effect? If you were Madeleine, what would you have done before deciding to quit?

-- What are your responsibilities to your co-workers?

IF YOU WANT TO LEARN MORE ABOUT DEALING WITH CO-WORKERS, GO TO PAGE 79.

iii. Working with Your Staff

-- Do you think Ms. Binks' reasons for choosing to keep Charlotte rather than Sadie were good ones? Explain your answer.

-- Do you think Mr. Liebowicz treated both Arnie and Nathan fairly? Why or why not?

-- What are the responsibilities of supervisors to their employees?

IF YOU WANT TO LEARN MORE ABOUT WORKING WITH YOUR STAFF, GO TO PAGE 81.

iv. Serving Customers or Clients

-- Ms. Binks said that the customer was always right. Do you think that Ms. Binks is right? Explain your answer.

-- In a service occupation, is it more important to do your work or to deal with customers? Give your reasons.

-- How should employees treat customers?

IF YOU WANT TO LEARN MORE ABOUT SERVING CUSTOMERS OR CLIENTS, GO TO PAGE 84.

1. Working with Supervisors

One of your most important relationships at work is with your boss. Your supervisor has authority over you. It is his/her job to assign you tasks, to check your progress and to evaluate your work. In the end, your future in the job depends to a large extent on your boss's assessment of your performance.

You don't have to be friends with your supervisor; you don't even have to like the individual. Not all supervisors are good at their jobs. And you will find it easier to relate to some people than to others. However, it is up to you to get along with your supervisor, no matter what your personal opinion of his/her work methods or personality. In the preceding story, for example, neither Arnie nor Nathan really liked their supervisor. However, Arnie recognized that it was his responsibility to make an effort to get along, while Nathan let his feelings of hostility show.

Sometimes you do run into a supervisor you really cannot work with. If this happens to you, you may find it necessary to ask for a transfer or find another job. However, you should try to avoid getting yourself fired because of the personality conflict. You are much better off keeping your temper, getting a new job and leaving with dignity.

Everyone encounters the problem of personality conflicts from time to time. If it has happened to you occasionally, there is no reason to think that there is something the matter with you. But if it has happened several times, you should assess your attitude towards people in positions of authority. If you have had trouble with several supervisors, with your teachers at school, with your parents or with public authorities such as police officers, it may be your behavior or attitude that is causing the problem. If this is the case, you should discuss the issue with your employment counsellor who can suggest some solutions.

Guidelines for Working with Supervisors

1. Respect your boss's authority. Remember, your supervisor has the responsibility for assigning you work. Even if you don't like the task,

you will have to do it. Therefore, it is better to accept the assignment willingly and pleasantly from the start.

2. Show a positive attitude to your supervisor. You show your attitude not only by what you say but also by your body language. If you have a cross or sullen look on your face, if you make hostile gestures like clenching your fists or glaring, or if your tone of voice is angry or disrespectful, your supervisor will pick up your negative attitude.

3. Listen to and follow your supervisor's instructions. If you aren't sure how to do this, go to page 65 of this Sourcebook, where you will find guidelines for receiving instructions effectively.

4. When you disagree with your supervisor, do so calmly and pleasantly. Do not lose your temper, raise your voice or make threats, since these things will only make your boss angry. Wait until you have cooled down before approaching him/her privately. Explain your problem calmly and objectively, using concrete facts. Then suggest a positive solution to the difficulty.

5. Let your supervisor be the one to determine the closeness of the relationship. Some bosses prefer to maintain formality with their employees; others prefer a warmer, friendlier approach. It takes tact to maintain a close, personal friendship with your boss. Not only does he or she have authority over you, which can strain the friendship, but also you must avoid offending your co-workers who may resent your favoured position.

6. Being human, supervisors tend to prefer those employees who don't cause them trouble. People who always seem to have a complaint or a criticism aren't appreciated. Nor are those people who must always be pushed to keep working. If you concentrate on maintaining good working methods and a positive and helpful attitude towards your co-workers and your job, you will probably have little difficulty getting along with your supervisor.

7. Before making major changes to your work routine, discuss your proposals with your supervisor. Although you may be unaware of it, your changes may affect other workers or work procedures. Since your supervisor has the responsibility for co-ordinating the activities of the whole group, s/he needs to assess the effects of the changes. Therefore both common courtesy and good sense require that you inform your boss of changes.

8. When you find yourself in conflict with your supervisor, you should bring the problem to his or her attention before griping to others or going over his/her head in the hierarchy. Often you will find that problems are based on misunderstandings and they can be solved through frank discussion.

9. By keeping your supervisor informed of your progress, you can avoid problems. It gives you the chance to bring problems to his/her attention, to change deadlines that are discovered to be unrealistic, or to make sure that your work is staying on the right track.

ii. Dealing with Co-workers

In most jobs, people work as part of a group. In order to get the work done quickly and well, it is necessary to co-operate. A work group can be compared to a complicated piece of machinery. When it is well-oiled and operating properly, all the parts work together smoothly and effortlessly. But when one part gets out of whack, it can interfere with the correct operation of the entire machine. In fact, if the problem gets serious enough, the whole mechanism can jam and grind to a halt.

Many people take the attitude that they were hired to do a job and as long as their work gets done, it is nobody's business how they relate to the other people at work. This is not a wise attitude to take.

First of all, it is rare for a person to work in isolation. To do your job well, you almost always have to rely on the work of others. Therefore you need their co-operation. Moreover, if you buy your own high level of productivity at the expense of your co-workers, you will not have gained much. Your supervisor's goal is to maintain a high level of output in an entire section and therefore must deal with the problems your attitudes cause among the other workers. The preceding story illustrates this point. Although Sadie did her own work very well, her unhelpful and superior attitude to her co-workers cost her a job.

You have a responsibility to be pleasant and co-operative towards your co-workers. This doesn't mean that you have to try to be everyone's best friend. You are perfectly within your rights to maintain your own privacy and to keep your co-workers at arm's length. Just make sure that your attitudes don't make it harder for others to do their jobs.

You will undoubtedly like some people better than others. Some may become particular friends. Others you may grow to dislike. But you should keep your opinions and your personal reactions to yourself and avoid letting them interfere with the way you do your job.

Although there will never be enough rules to cover all possible situations, the guidelines below may help you figure out appropriate methods for dealing with your co-workers.

Guidelines for Dealing with Co-workers

1. Make an effort to be pleasant to the people you work with. A friendly greeting in the morning and a casual good-bye when you leave can go a long way towards creating a comfortable atmosphere.

2. Don't gossip about other workers or gripe constantly about the job. First of all, you probably don't know who is friendly with whom and your words may get back to the person you were talking about. Second, people don't trust a gossip. They rightly think that if you'll talk about Mary-Jane when she's not there, you'll do the same to them when their backs are turned. Griping about the job can be just as destructive. You'll get a reputation for being a complainer and a bore. And you give people the impression that you think they are wasting their time doing trivial things. People don't like to feel that they are wasting their lives, so they will begin to avoid you.

3. Be a responsible member of the team. Make sure your part of the work is done correctly and on time. Take responsibility for your mistakes rather than blaming them on others. Pitch in and help when one person is swamped with work. Then, when you need help, others will be willing to lend you a hand.

4. Try to avoid interrupting the work of others. First of all, make sure that you get your own work done so others can do theirs. Second, don't disturb people when they are working. Keep social chatter to a minimum except at coffee or lunch breaks. As well, do your own work quietly and keep your conversations short and quiet.

iii. Working with Your Staff

Supervising others is a very demanding task. As a supervisor, your main goal is to get your group to produce as efficiently as possible. Therefore, you must be concerned with the quality and quantity of their work. But workers are not machines. You can't just feed them instructions and push the start button to get them going. Each person must be treated as an individual. Methods that work with one person may have no effect at all with another.

Very few people begin as supervisors. Usually they begin in junior positions where they have the chance to observe the supervisory methods and styles used by others. This is a good place to gather ideas about both good and poor supervisory techniques. Think about the supervisors you have had and make a list of their good and bad points. What did you like about working for them? What didn't you like? Write down some of the incidents that made you either very pleased or very angry. Then think about how you might have handled a similar situation. As well, look around you to see how other supervisors behave. Compare your behavior to theirs and try to assess the results you expect your techniques to have.

The guidelines below have been tried by many supervisors and found effective. As well, there are many books available that deal with supervisory methods. If you feel concerned about your performance in this area, you might find it helpful to obtain and read some of them.

Guidelines for Working with Your Staff

1. Don't just give orders. Try to explain what needs to be done, why it is being done, and where it fits into the whole operation. Most people do a better job if they understand the purpose of the work they are doing. They may even come up with surprisingly good suggestions for improvements.

2. Make sure that your employees understand your instructions. Don't try to hurry through your explanations. Make your instructions specific and show what you mean by using concrete examples. If possible, do an example yourself to show what you mean.

3. Encourage your workers to ask questions or bring you problems. To do this, you must take time, show that you are listening by asking appropriate questions, and demonstrate through your words, your tone of voice and your body language that you are concerned and interested. Encourage your employees to bring their first attempts at a new task to you for your approval. This means that you must check their work carefully and promptly.

4. Give feedback promptly and often. Praise work that is well done and explain why it is good. Correct poor work right away. When work is done poorly, try to find the cause of the problem. It may be that the worker has not understood your instructions or is under pressures that you are not aware of.

5. Treat all workers equally. Avoid showing favoritism to one individual over another. Keep work loads about even. Nothing leads to poor morale in a work group more quickly than the feeling that different rules apply to different people.

6. When criticizing an employee, do so in private. Explain the issue as objectively as possible, using examples from the person's work or behavior. Specify how you expect the person to improve and spell out the consequences of continued poor performance.

7. Maintain daily contact with each person you supervise. Keep track of the goals you have set each person and their progress towards achieving those aims. If you are away frequently or are usually too busy to spend time with each employee, it is likely that the productivity of your employees will decline.

8. Settle problems quickly. As soon as you become aware of production or interpersonal problems in your group, you should attempt to deal with them. Stalling in the hope that the problems will go away rarely works. In fact, the passage of time often turns small problems into large ones.

9. Give your employees some control over their work assignments and their work methods. People need to feel in control of their lives. As well, they are usually more committed to doing a good job when they have had a say in designing their tasks.

iv. Serving Customers or Clients

In many occupations, getting along with people is the job. For example, if you work as a sales clerk, a bank teller, a bus driver, a social worker or a diplomat, you aren't doing your job properly if you cannot deal with customers or clients politely and courteously. Of course, in any of these occupations you have other tasks besides dealing with people. But unless you deal with people well, it doesn't matter how well you do the other things.

There is no simple definition that can tell you how to deal with all kinds of people in a service relationship. Perhaps the most comprehensive answer can still be found in the Golden Rule: "Do unto others as you would have them do unto you."

In service-centred occupations, and there are hundreds of them in our society, the ideal worker is one who is untiringly patient, courteous and cool-tempered. This is very hard to achieve. It is only human to react to anger and hostility by getting angry ourselves. If one customer treats you badly, you are just as likely as not to want to take your frustration out on the next person who comes along. Unfortunately, this just makes the whole situation worse, because the second person is likely to get annoyed back, and the vicious circle starts all over again. No one can tell you how to behave with different types of people because this will depend on your own personality. You may find the following guidelines helpful, however.

Guidelines for Serving Customers or Clients

1. Always act on the assumption that serving customers is your most important work task. This means that you should stop whatever you are doing to serve a customer.

2. Greet your customers promptly and politely. Speak first, without waiting to be spoken to. A simple remark like, "How may I help you?" is all that is required.

3. Do not crowd or harass customers. If you continue to hover about after they've told you they're "just looking," people are likely to become uncomfortable and may leave without doing any business. There's a fine line between being available to assist customers and shadowing them. Try to be sensitive to people's reactions to your manner, and act accordingly.

4. Never lose your temper with a customer. Even when a client is being rude or aggressive, you must not answer back in kind. Listen courteously to the customer's complaints without interrupting or defending yourself or your employer. Apologize for the problem, even if you feel that it isn't your fault. Then explain the company policy for dealing with that type of situation, pleasantly and firmly. If the customer becomes very angry or unreasonable, take him/her to see your supervisor, whose responsibility it is to deal with such situations.

Chapter 4 / Showing Initiative

INTRODUCTION

When employers are asked to name the quality they think is most important in an outstanding employee, their most common answer is initiative. What is initiative? Well, the dictionary defines it as "the readiness and ability to be the one to start a course of action." In short, a person with initiative is a leader rather than a follower.

You can show initiative, not only by major achievements, but more importantly, by small day-to-day activities. For example, if you run across misfiled material, you show initiative by refiling it correctly. In cases like this, no one is likely to know about your efforts. Rather, you will get a personal sense of satisfaction from having solved a potential problem and from doing your own job well. On the other hand, over time, people will notice that you do a little extra and will appreciate your efforts. They may even reward you in some way such as a raise or a promotion.

It is a good idea to start showing initiative in small matters first. As you learn more about the job, you can begin to take more responsibility. An important aspect of initiative is good judgment and this only comes through experience.

Initiative can be demonstrated by such actions as recognizing and acting upon priorities; by adapting to new situations; by solving problems sensibly when they appear; and by accepting responsibility and taking action without waiting for direct instructions from your supervisor. Like every aspect of working, though, initiative requires the exercise of good judgment. To

initiate an action successfully, you must understand the goals of the organization you work for, and you must make sure that your efforts contribute to the achievement of those goals. The following story is a dramatic example of how this can be done in a work setting. It is an illustration of the goal you should be working towards.

* *

"WHERE THERE'S A WILL, THERE'S A WAY..."

When Emilia walked in Tuesday morning, she found everyone gathered at the windows of the darkened office, laughing and chatting merrily. "What's up?" she asked, surprised. "What's the matter with the lights?"

"It's a holiday," Mario answered laughingly. "All the power is out and the boss isn't coming in until eleven this morning. We were just deciding what to do."

"I think we should all go to the cafeteria," chimed in Linda. "We'll have some light there and we can at least get a coffee. There's no point hanging around here."

Emilia looked concerned. "But there's that report for the vice-president," she pointed out hesitatingly. "It's supposed to be ready by noon and it's urgent."

"Well there's not much we can do about it, is there?" answered Mike. "The power is out so we can't get the computer run. And the report itself is stored in the memory of the electronic typewriter. We can't get at that either. I guess we could finish the charts, but there's no point if the report isn't ready too. And who knows when the power will come back on. He'll just have to wait."

"Hummm...," Emilia pondered. "Well, yes, it is a problem. But the stuff is urgent, you know. I was talking to the vice-president's secretary on the way in and apparently there's an important Board meeting today. The vice-president has to present this report today. The proposal he's presenting could mean a whole new project for the company. But they have to act fast...Maybe I should call maintenance and find out when the power will be fixed. Don't go anywhere until I find out, O.K.?"

While Emilia was telephoning, the others argued quietly among themselves. "I don't see that it's our problem," Linda said. "After all, the

power's out and that's not our fault. Anyway, they should have given us the stuff earlier. We always get everything at the last minute and then we get the blame if it's not done on time. I think we should just forget it for today."

Mario wasn't convinced. "I think Emilia is right, you know," he argued. "We should at least get as much done as we can. If it's as important as she says, I don't want to get in trouble for not getting my part done."

Emilia returned looking disturbed. "Well, maintenance says that they don't think it'll be fixed before two o'clock at the earliest," she announced. "But I have an idea. We have the last computer run with the changes marked on it. Perhaps we can fix it up and put on the headings ourselves. It won't look perfect but it'll be better than nothing. And we have the final draft of the report as well. Maybe two of us can use the old manual typewriters and get the final done. It's only 40 pages long so we should be able to finish it by noon. And Linda can finish the charts like she was going to anyway. If we move a couple of tables over by the window we should have enough light to work. What do you think?"

"Well, I guess it's worth a try," Mario said. "I hope it's not the wrong thing to do."

"Don't worry, I'll take the blame if the boss doesn't like it," Emilia answered. "Shall we get going? Mike, why don't you and I split the typing and let Mario make the corrections on the computer run?" Grumbling a bit, everyone got organized and set to work.

At 11:15, Mr. Roberge, the supervisor, hurried in looking flustered. "What is going on in here?" he asked sharply as soon as he had taken in the scene.

"Go ahead and tell him, Emilia, it's your ball game," Mike said nervously.

So Emilia explained. "Well, it's like this, Mr. Roberge. The power is off and maintenance says it won't be fixed until this afternoon. So Mike and I are typing the final draft of that urgent report for the vice-president on the manual typewriters, Mario is making corrections on the last computer run and Linda is finishing the charts. I figure we can take the stuff to a commercial photocopy shop when we've finished. That way we should be able to get the stuff finished by noon like we were told to. Oh, and we had to move the tables over here by the windows to get enough light. But we'll move everything back when we're finished."

"I see...Whose idea was this?" Mr. Roberge inquired.

"Well,...mine actually," Emilia answered after a moment.

"I'm very pleased!" the supervisor replied. "That report is extremely urgent. In fact, it's top priority. You all deserve a great deal of credit for getting it done. And you've shown a good deal of initiative, Emilia; I'm proud of you."

* *

THE NEXT STEPS

Below are some questions about the preceding story. Discuss your answers with a friend or write them on a separate sheet of paper. PLEASE DO NOT WRITE IN THIS BOOK.

-- Whose point of view did you agree with more, Emilia's or Linda's? Explain your answer.

-- What things did Emilia do that showed she had initiative?

-- If you had to promote one of these people, who would you choose? Give your reasons for your answer.

Showing Initiative - Discussion

In the preceding story, both Linda and Emilia took the initiative. Linda tried to persuade the other members of her work group to leave their task until normal working conditions had been restored. Emilia, on the other hand, exercised initiative in the direction of completing the assigned work goal. In a work environment, successful leadership is more than just persuading others to follow a course of action you recommend; it is initiating a course of action that is directed towards achieving company goals. As the preceding story illustrates, showing initiative in a positive way demands the use of good judgment.

Clues for Assessing Your Initiative

1. Do you wait until you are told before beginning a new task?

2. If you think something is being done wrong, do you figure that it is someone else's problem?

3. Do you figure that doing your own job well is all that should matter to your supervisor?

4. Do you resent being asked to take over for another employee who is absent or overworked?

5. Do you avoid suggesting changes because you feel no one will listen or that it probably isn't a very good idea anyway?

If you have answered "Yes" to more than one of these questions, it is possible that you are unwilling or unable to show initiative. If you would like to show more initiative but aren't sure how to go about it, the following guidelines may help you.

Guidelines for Showing Initiative

1. Aim for a broad perspective. To do this, you should try to understand the goals of the organization you work for. There are two main ways to

do this. First, you should read the organization's publications, such as annual reports. These will help you identify the purpose of the company and the organizational structure that has been developed to meet these objectives. Second, keep your eyes and ears open to find out what other people in the organization are doing and why. In the preceding story, Emilia discovered, by talking to the vice-president's secretary, that the report her division was working on was vitally important.

2. Learn to assess priorities. Not every task you do is equally important. You should learn which of your duties is most important, which is second, and so on. Then, when you run short of time, you will know which things you should do first. One way to find out your priorities is to read your job description carefully. These descriptions are usually organized with the most important duty first, etc. Another method is to ask your supervisor to tell you what your priorities should be.

3. Be adaptable to change. For example, if your supervisor asks you to perform a new task, to take over for someone who is absent, or to change your daily routine to meet a sudden need, a person with initiative will respond to the new challenge willingly--even enthusiastically. This type of behavior shows both a willingness to learn and a commitment to the needs of the organization.

4. Be a problem-solver. Almost every day, workers are faced with problems that need solving. It is possible to report every new problem to your supervisor and follow the instructions you receive. People with initiative, however, try to come up with solutions themselves, before taking the issue to the supervisor. For example, if something seems to be wrong with a piece of machinery or equipment, you would not ignore it in the hope that the problem would disappear or be dealt with by someone else. Rather, you would report the problem to the person responsible for repairing it after determining that you couldn't fix it yourself. In the preceding story, Emilia recognized that the power failure was going to cause a problem for the vice-president. Therefore, she worked out a solution that would meet the main objective of getting the report ready by noon.

5. Take responsibility for your work. If you have been assigned a task, it is up to you to get it done satisfactorily and on time. There are almost always difficulties in getting a job done. Many people are like Linda--they blame external circumstances like power failures for their inability to get the job done. People with initiative look for ways around the problem because they recognize that they themselves are responsible for their work.

6. Show a willingness to learn. Leaders have the self-confidence and the eagerness to keep on learning. They learn from books, by taking evening courses, from their own experience and from other workers. They seek to expand their area of competence by asking questions when they don't understand, from observing and listening to others, and through trying new things. Everyone makes mistakes; people with initiative learn from them.